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Roles, Reproduction, and Resistance Within Spectacle Culture  
in Young Adult Dystopian Literature

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Spring 2015

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But all joking aside, thank you for guiding me along this stressful but ultimately rewarding process. I feel like I've learned more about writing through the process of writing this thesis than I ever have before. It's also the most fun I've ever had writing a paper, and the best academic experience I've had at Vassar to date. This semester, I truly found confidence in myself as a writer and a thinker, and I have this whole experience to thank for that. Thank you so much for seeing something in me, and fostering such an environment in which I felt comfortable to experiment and grow to a place where I can honestly say this is the best thing I've ever written. Thank you!

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## Introduction

As of the year 2015, the young adult dystopian genre has saturated popular culture. While dystopian novels have been published for young adults for years, Western culture's current fascination with the genre was sparked in 2008, with the publishing of Suzanne Collins' novel *The Hunger Games*. The novel was on *The New York Times* Bestsellers list for children's chapter books for more than 100 consecutive weeks (van Straaten and Everett). Veronica Roth's 2011 novel *Divergent* was also a *New York Times* best seller, spending eleven consecutive weeks on the that same list (Bell). The genre's popularity really began to boom in 2012, with the theatrical release of *The Hunger Games* film adaptation, earning approximately \$700 million worldwide (IMDb). Combined with its follow-up sequels, released in 2013 and 2014, respectively, the franchise has made over \$1 billion so far (IMDb). Coasting off *The Hunger Games'* success, the *Divergent* franchise was soon to follow, with the first film adaptation released in 2014, grossing approximately \$300 million worldwide, and the first of three sequels released in 2015 (IMDb). Dystopian films make money—even older dystopian novels are being adapted to film, such as Lois Lowry's 1993 novel *The Giver* in 2014, grossing \$45 million (IMDb). As *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* have not yet released their final installments, dystopian fever is unlikely to go away anytime soon.

Rather ironically, these books have been propped up by the very spectacle culture that inspired their dystopian societies. However, it is precisely because the books stem from it themselves that they have a lot to say about spectacle culture.

They're particularly preoccupied with the roles it forces us to play, how sex and reproduction pose a threat to its control, and whether resistance could ever lead to liberation. I define "spectacle" here to refer to an event, product, or general phenomenon designed for mass viewership and/or consumption, whether that be for entertainment purposes (like a television show, or a sporting event), cultural significance (like a religious ritual), or for something more sinister (like propaganda). A spectacle can also be manipulated in two directions, used as a lens by which to spectate upon its own audience, often with an ulterior motive (like Google tracking people's web searches to determine what advertisements to target them with). A spectacle is not necessarily good or bad—it's when it's used as the means to an oppressive end that it becomes harmful and dangerous.

I use the term "spectacle culture" to refer to the predominant set of messages arising from the combination of spectacles produced within a society, systemically utilized and/or manipulated in order to influence the population that watches and participates in it. Essentially, the term refers to mass media, but not just movies or television broadcasts. It's broader than that, and it's layered. Spectacle culture encompasses all of the information we consume, from news broadcasts to movies to text messages to language itself, all of which contribute their own layer of spectacle to the culture at large. As a result, spectacle culture sends mixed, sometimes downright contradictory messages: for example, simultaneously placing value on both sexual innocence and objectification. However, this is precisely where spectacle culture gains its power, and why it's so pervasive: no matter what option someone chooses, they're still acting in service of the spectacle. Spectacle culture

sets the terms for our socialization, dictating the means by which we communicate and becoming deeply embedded within our mindsets.

Spectacle culture determines what information we're exposed to, and how that information is framed. As all spectacles inherently contribute to spectacle culture, it's impossible for any one person or group to dominate it *entirely*. However, those who produce or control the most visible and pervasive spectacles do have a greater hold on spectacle culture, and can therefore control it to seize and/or maintain power. Therefore, even though everyone is under the influence of multiple layers of spectacle culture, they can still contribute their own "layer," or message, to influence it in return, although it would take a lot of power (that most people don't have) in order to have a significant effect.

In other words, because spectacle culture contains multiple layers, people are allotted agency within it. I use the term "agency" to refer to the capacity to act independently and make one's own choices. Agency is nuanced within spectacle culture, because while people are free to make their own choices, the spectacle determines the options presented to them. This is the mechanism by which spectacle culture pervades society to the degree that it can "allot" and "limit" the agency of its subjects. Agency is directly proportional to the amount of options available, although always inherently limited to some degree by the confines of spectacle culture itself.

Therefore, spectacle culture is a particularly useful tool in terms of keeping a population passive and compliant. Those who control the spectacle can decide how it informs people on issues of race, class, gender, and even one's own subjectivity.

Even in modern day society, where spectacle culture pervades virtually every aspect of our lives, it's become so embedded within our mindsets that we only easily recognize it in its most blatant forms, particularly capitalist ventures like advertising or televised entertainment. Otherwise, the apparatus hides in plain sight (as is the case with language) or has been so normalized that we no longer treat it with caution (like telephone screens or the Internet).

What makes *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Giver* so adept at critiquing spectacle culture is that they make this often-invisible apparatus visible through their dystopian manifestations of it. It's much easier to critique an overt representation (for example, kids killing kids on live television) than a more subtle form of spectacle influence. The more sinister aspects of modern day spectacle culture are brought to light in an exaggerated yet poignant dystopian setting. It's not that Collins, Roth, and Lowry's respective spectacle cultures lack subtlety, but that the nuances of spectacle culture are more easily illuminated once the texts shed light on its dominating effect on society and subjectivity. Once the apparatus of spectacle culture is made visible to the public, it's easier to analyze its implications, particularly its usage as a vehicle for all forms of influence and control.

Through their narratives of resistance within the fictional societies they create, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy, and Lois Lowry's *The Giver* offer compelling analyses and critiques of spectacle culture. Given the role they play in modern spectacle culture and their resulting influence over today's youth, it's important to study these critiques, as they warn and remind us of the dangers of passively accepting the status quo.



There are many young adult dystopian novels out there, but what makes these *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Giver* uniquely suited for an in-depth study of representations of spectacle culture isn't just their presence within it. While spectacle culture requires that people juggle multiple roles within it (often simultaneously), Katniss, Tris, and Jonas are each primarily focused on one role in particular. This role dictates the way they navigate their resistance, and helps determine whether or not they actually succeed in their fight for liberation. In this essay, I analyze each dystopia individually, covering *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the *Divergent* trilogy, and *The Giver*, respectively. Each chapter will cover three key themes.

Firstly, I examine the **roles** played by each protagonist within his or her respective spectacle cultures. In Chapter 1, I examine Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008) and its sequels, *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010), and how their protagonist, sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen plays the role of performer within spectacle culture. Katniss uses her knowledge of the spectacle to appeal to sponsors and become a contender in the annual Hunger Games, a televised fight-to-the-death. In the rebellion that follows, Katniss continues to use her performance skills when she becomes the symbol of the revolution. Then, in Chapter 2, I analyze Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011) and its sequels *Insurgent* (2012) and *Allegiant* (2013), and how their protagonist, sixteen-year-old Tris Prior, represents the internalization of spectacle culture. Her Faction leaders are so preoccupied with controlling her thoughts that they induce hallucinations and project them onscreen for observation. Meanwhile, they in turn are observed by an outside group studying

their society as part of a social experiment. Finally, in Chapter 3, I analyze Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), and how its protagonist, twelve-year old Jonas, plays the role of spectator. Jonas is gifted with the ability to view his community's collective memories and "see beyond" the genetically engineered spectacle of Sameness, which subdues and homogenizes the sensory intake of the community's population.

Secondly, I explore the texts' exploration of the use of sex and **reproduction** as a vehicle of rebellion against spectacle culture. As young adults, Katniss, Tris, and Jonas' greatest threat to the status quo is the threat of reproduction. This reproduction need not be sexual, because while sex and sexuality do play significant roles within their respective revolutions, I also use the term "reproduction" in the metaphoric sense. While in spectacle theory, the term "reproduction" refers to the way spectacle culture perpetuates itself, Katniss, Tris, and Jonas all interrupt that cycle by engaging in a different type of metaphoric reproduction, referring to the continuation and confirmation of values. However, these young rebels choose to continue and confirm the *marginalized* values within their dystopian societies, most of which are in some way tied to family. After wrestling the power of reproduction away from their oppressors and departing from the values of the old regime, their youthful hands work to rebuild their respective societies from the ground up, creating new possibilities for the next generation.

But can they succeed? To conclude each chapter, I analyze each protagonist's methods of **resistance** to spectacle culture, and determine whether or not they were ultimately successful in escaping it. I examine how the book in question argues whether or not that liberation from spectacle culture is possible, and the conditions

that make that so. Can we escape spectacle culture? If so, which role best equips us to do so? Tune in to find out.

**“How I Want to Play That”: Performance Within Spectacle Culture  
in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* Trilogy**

*The Hunger Games* protagonist Katniss Everdeen represents the performative aspect of spectacle culture, as she markets herself to the Capitol’s audience and corporate sponsors in order to gain the necessary support to survive in the Hunger Games. After all, “[i]t’s all about how [she’s] perceived” (Collins 2008:135). Having grown up in Panem, where the annual Hunger Games and its associated media circus are mandatory viewing, Katniss is well aware of how the game is played.

Katniss’ dystopian society is based on this annual televised spectacle. The Hunger Games serve to keep the twelve districts in line. As punishment for uprising against the Capitol 74 years ago, every year one boy and one girl are reaped from each District to fight to the death in the annual Hunger Games. Only one victor will be allowed to return home, rewarded with riches for themselves and food for their District. It’s a brutal form of social control, but the spectacle of the Hunger Games isn’t just about killing District children. To further humiliate the Districts, the Hunger Games also serves to entertain protected and privileged Capitol citizens, who, exempted from the Reaping, can emotionally detach from the horror, bet on their favorites, and get lost in the drama and excitement of waiting to see what happens next. The Hunger Games function to socialize both the Capitol citizens and the District populations to passively accept the order of society and its power structures. Capitol citizens are taught to accept violence as entertainment, while the Districts are reminded by the annual spectacle that “[they] are totally at [the

Capitol's] mercy[...]if [they] lift a finger, [the Capitol] will destroy every last one of [them]" (Collins 2008:18-19).

The Hunger Games is, as Katniss' mentor Haymitch puts it, "all a big show" (Collins 2008:135). For Capitol citizens, it contains all the excitement of watching or betting on the Super Bowl, but with the added thrill of the brutality and finality of death. The entire experience of watching the Hunger Games is packaged and sold, sanitized with exciting music, costumes, and live commentary. Therefore, the Capitol audience is given emotional distance from the sorrow of death. It's treated as a dramatic entertainment, not someone's lived experience. Selling the glossy experience of watching the show rather than the raw, un-retouched reality of murdered children allows the Capitol to gleefully and unquestionably buy into the spectacle of violence, while the Districts watch in horror. This glamorous, unfeeling presentation is what adds insult to injury to the Districts who are already traumatized by being forced to watch their children die. The tributes are also humiliated: because the Districts aren't accorded the privilege to care about appearances like Capitol citizens, it's an entirely foreign experience for the tributes to be dressed up and paraded around the Capitol like the latest commodity—which, of course, they are. The experience being packaged and sold for slaughter does have a dehumanizing aspect.

In Panem, the spectacle is deeply intertwined with capitalism, not unlike our own society. In order to survive the Hunger Games, the tributes must appeal to rich Capitol sponsors, whose gifts of food, weapons, or medicine can mean life or death in the Games. People are literally "buying into" the spectacle. It's an extreme version

of corporate sponsorship. It's a reciprocal relationship: the tributes get their gifts while the sponsors are able to feel the excitement of betting on and rooting for their favorites, feeling pride and responsibility if they rank in one of the honored top eight slots, or better yet, actually win.

However, Katniss and the other tributes are afforded some agency, if they can manage the strength to navigate it. While Katniss must play the Game by the Capitol's rules and within the system, she is able to choose just how she commoditizes herself. What angle can she sell? While others choose to market themselves as violent killers or sexual objects, playing off the audience's (blood)lust, Katniss and her mentor Haymitch, somewhat subversively, conspire to play up a budding romance between Katniss and her district partner, Peeta Mellark, in order to appeal to the audience's sentimentality for young love. In a market where tributes are often forced to be complicit in their own dehumanization, often as an object of lust, to be an object of love instead is a surprisingly human approach. Yet it works. Even though romance may appear to be the antithesis to violence, it provides a similar dramatic effect. Viewers' hearts race as they eagerly await the next kiss, just as they await the next kill. Of course, "playing" this angle means that Katniss must now market her feelings for Peeta, forced to navigate her romantic anxieties under the looming gaze of the omnipresent cameras. She must balance genuine emotion with the performance of romance, although she eventually finds that the two aren't mutually exclusive. Even her innermost feelings become tangled up in the spectacle.

Therefore, as Katniss navigates the arena, her feelings about the agency allotted within spectacle culture slowly and dramatically evolve. At the start of the

Games, she first begins to realize that this agency exists in the first place, and that she has the power to exploit it. But then, when she meets up with Peeta and their relationship progresses, she realizes that with her expressions of love under constant surveillance, her private feelings become public property—and that doesn't sit well with her. While this may be the act she has chosen to perform, it becomes more and more uncomfortable to do so. She decides that regardless of the potential benefits of performance, she still prefers privacy. She doesn't want to play the Game anymore. Unfortunately, this isn't possible. As the Katniss-and-Peeta show continues long after they win the Games, Katniss realizes that no matter how much she wants to, she can't simply opt out of spectacle culture. She'll never truly be able to escape its confines.

Even before she directly interacts with Peeta during the Games, Katniss is clearly camera-savvy. As a citizen of Panem and annual witness to the Hunger Games spectacle, Katniss has learned a lot in her sixteen years about the nature of spectacle. In Katniss' eyes, to spectate is still to participate. While the Capitol viewers have used their afforded agency to aggressively contribute to the violence with their bets and sponsorships, Katniss has formerly been allocated a more passive role, legally forced to watch her neighbors die with no possible recourse. Yet participate she did. All those years of watching were also years of schooling. Through observation, Katniss learned what to expect in the arena and what survival strategies work the best (and worst). While she may not be carrying any weapons (yet), she is armed with knowledge—and knowledge is power. Being fully informed rather than kept in the dark (in this book, at least) about the machinations of the

spectacle allows her to exploit them. Despite ultimately being a Capitol pawn within the Hunger Games, she knows that she has agency in terms of how she presents herself.

The agency allotted through her understanding of the spectacle's machinations is evident when she overhears Peeta with the Career pack. Katniss knows that all of Panem's eyes are on her, and subverts her role as powerless tribute by exploiting her opportunity to play to their emotions:

The audience will have been beside themselves, knowing I was in the tree, that I overheard the Careers talking, that I discovered Peeta was with them. Until I work out exactly how I want to play that, I'd better at least act on top of things. Not perplexed. Certainly not confused or frightened.

No, I need to look one step ahead of the game.

So as I slide out of the foliage and into the dawn light, I pause a second, giving the cameras time to lock on me. Then I cock my head slightly to the side and give a knowing smile. There! Let them figure out what that means! (Collins 2008:163-164)

As Katniss reflects on how she wants to "play that," and determines to "look one step ahead of the game," she describes her performance as if it's all a Game—which it is, albeit a high stakes one. Children play games, and for Katniss, it's a game of make-believe. This is the essence of the spectacle: it has warped reality into something inauthentic and unnatural, stripping the tributes of their humanity so that it's easy to forget that they're only twelve to eighteen years old. Prior to the creation of the Hunger Games, child's play (and childhood in general) was innocent and under the gentle watch of parents. This was the natural state of things.

However, the spectacle has warped childhood into something violent, interrupting the natural cycle of reproduction by yanking children from the protection of their parents and placing them under the prying gaze of the Capitol audience instead.



Even the woods, which have always been a comfortable space for Katniss, far from the Capitol spectacle and oppression of District 12, have been warped into a fabricated environment entirely controlled by man. The woods used to represent the anti-spectacle for her, but because the Capitol has appropriated even that, it's no longer safe for her to hide in within the arena's unnatural, faux "foliage."

"Slide[ing] out of the foliage and into the dawn light" is symbolic for Katniss recognizing her own power, coming out from hiding and embracing her place in the spotlight, officially leaving her idea of the anti-spectacle behind. By "cock[ing]" her head, Katniss shows that she is feeling cocky and arrogant, pleased with the power she has to intrigue her audience. By smiling at the camera, she's returning the Capitol's gaze, establishing even more power within the spectacle as she makes its apparatus visible to the audience. The arena may appear to be a natural environment as far as viewers (and perhaps even readers) are concerned, but Katniss reminds her audience that even though the cameras are hidden, she knows it's all a big show. Through this gesture, Katniss embraces her fabricated environment, and is ready to denaturalize herself along with it by performing for the cameras.

However, when adding Peeta into the mix, Katniss no longer feels so sure of herself; it's no longer just a game. Instead of playfully teasing the audience, Katniss must painfully and awkwardly navigate her own emotional landscape and what she chooses to reveal to make the star-crossed love story seem convincing. Up until now, it's been a straight game of make-believe, with all her outward emotions falsified for the cameras. But with Peeta, Katniss starts to genuinely feel something.

She can no longer maintain an emotional distance from her performance; gone are the days of the confident smirks. This is when things get “real” for Katniss. She’s now selling genuine emotions to the cameras, leaving her in a more vulnerable position than before. Even though the romance act is her best shot at keeping herself (and Peeta) alive, Katniss still begins to feel uncomfortable in her role as performer.

Of course, Katniss isn’t immediately enamored by Peeta. The first time she kisses him, it’s not a result of any private, romantic feelings. Instead, it is a very public act of survival, an appeal to the Capitol audience to donate money to buy her food and medicine:

Impulsively, I lean forward and kiss him, stopping his words. This is probably overdue anyway since he’s right, we are supposed to be madly in love. It’s the first time I’ve ever kissed a boy, which should make some sort of impression, I guess, but all I can register is how unnaturally hot his lips are from the fever. (Collins 260-261)

Knowing that the audience expects them to publicly display their affection for one another, Katniss kisses Peeta because she’s “supposed” to. Playing off expectations of how “hot” a first kiss may be expected to be, the text is sure to explain that the only heat radiating from this kiss is just another reminder of the looming threat of death. Katniss uses the word “unnatural” to describe the heat in particular, but it has greater significance for her entire situation. The heat is just another manifestation of the spectacle, as the implied romantic chemistry is entirely fabricated. Nothing is genuine: even the most private of moments is manufactured for entertainment value. Katniss recognizes this, and understands that she must play this more dangerous game in order to stay alive. After a gift of hot broth appears from her sponsors following the kiss, she understands that these intimate moments are now

to be used as barter: “Haymitch couldn’t be sending me a clearer message. One kiss equals one pot of broth” (Collins 2008:261). Hot moments beget hot food. In this way, Katniss exchanges one commodity for another, selling her performance for her and Peeta’s sake, hoping to keep the sponsors satisfied enough to continue to donate to their cause.

Katniss goes along with this exploitative system, albeit begrudgingly, for her first few days with Peeta, but it doesn’t come easy. Survival necessitates that she perform romance, but she doesn’t know how:

I’ve got to give the audience something more to care about...Never having been in love, this is going to be a real trick. I think of my parents. The way my father never failed to bring her gifts from the woods. The way my mother’s face would light up at the sound of his boots at the door. The way she almost stopped living when he died. (Collins 2008:261)

Katniss is following a romantic “script” for her performance in the Hunger Games. Even though she’s inexperienced, her performing of romance is hardly foreign to even the most serial daters in today’s society. Following the script of romance novels or romantic comedy films, people today take their cues on how to show romantic feelings from the media. Of course, these spectators can’t wait to be in the spotlight themselves: grand romantic gestures like proposing at a sports stadium put them at the center of attention, and their romance becomes a spectacle. Even the more routine elements of romance, like going to dinner and movie, or buying your partner flowers for Valentine’s Day, are all about going through the motions. Katniss, therefore, decides that the best way to indicate that she’s in love is to follow the motions she’s been taught.

What differentiates her romantic script from today's, however, is that hers is based on real people. Unlike her education in fabrication from watching the Hunger Games, this wasn't something she learned from watching television. It came from her parents, two people genuinely in love, romancing each other in their private home with only their daughters to watch them. This represents a shift from the fabricated to the authentic, from "script" to raw emotion. While the spectacle had attempted to appropriate "child's play," Katniss is now returning to a more natural state, gaining gentle inspiration from her parents to change the rules of the Game. As Katniss attempts to mimic the realness of their relationship, she finds that her feelings for Peeta may be may not be entirely fabricated after all:

And while I was talking, the idea of actually losing Peeta hit me again and I realized how much I don't want him to die. And it's not about the sponsors. And it's not about what will happen back home. And it's not just that I don't want to be alone. I do not want to lose the boy with the bread. (Collins 2008: 297)

Here, Katniss begins to separate strategizing in the Games from the tangle of emotions she feels for Peeta. The moment of realization comes when she remembers the gift he gave her years ago, when he helped feed her bread when she and her family were starving. This gift—with nothing expected in return—profoundly affected Katniss, who has since worked solely within a capitalist system of barter and trade. Gift culture is foreign to her; it exists entirely outside of that system. Even the "gifts" sent by Haymitch come with implied conditions for Katniss, while Peeta's gift came at a cost only to himself. It involved sacrifice: Peeta suffered a beating from his mother for burning the bread, but little did she know that was

intentional. He burnt the bread that it would no longer be sellable, and therefore available to give to Katniss.

Peeta's selfless act gave Katniss hope for the future, and also the confidence to venture into the woods to find food for her family. Thinking back to this moment has the same drastic effect on her, even under the looming gaze of the Capitol. Remembering the selflessness that Peeta's love had inspired in him, so genuine and uncorrupted by both capitalism and spectacle, she's ready to let it inspire her, once again headed into uncharted territory as she embraces genuine feeling instead of calculated performance-for-profit. No longer does she care for Peeta with the intention of getting something in return. Like the bread he burned, their love is no longer for sale.

Katniss begins to value the private feelings of intimacy between them over appeasing the Capitol—"it's not about the sponsors" (Collins 2008:297) anymore, a turning point for their relationship. Now that she views her relationship through anticapitalist values of selflessness and authenticity (as opposed to a more selfish, spectacle-friendly perpetuation of romance as commodity), she begins to resist publicizing their moments together and putting them under the capitalist gaze:

I wish I could pull the shutters closed, blocking out this moment from the prying eyes of Panem. Even if it means losing food. Whatever I'm feeling, it's no one's business but mine. (Collins 2008:297-298)

It's official: Katniss wants out of spectacle culture. Her feelings are no one's "business": no longer are her and Peeta's kisses financial transactions, no longer do her outward emotions exist for public consumption. She doesn't like emotionally prostituting herself. While necessary for her survival, Katniss doesn't want to sell

emotions she truly feels, exposing her vulnerability. While Katniss isn't sure what exactly she's feeling, she knows it's genuine. She recognizes that the emotional costs of selling her emotions would never allow her to truly profit from this system. With her feelings so raw, unmediated, and serving no ulterior motive, they're far too complex to be ever be packaged or sold. It's no longer about the performance. And that changes the stakes.

It's a rebellious position; resisting the spectacle's pressure to perform a fabricated, calculated self by embracing authenticity. Her relationship with Peeta is what frames Katniss' narrative of anti-authoritarian resistance; she takes a stand at the intersection of romantic love and spectacle culture. Love cannot be falsified or fabricated, and as the Hunger Games' spectacle is all about fabrication, love changes the game—literally. The Gamemakers, for the first time in Hunger Games history, have changed the rules to allow two winners from the same home district. Katniss and Peeta's popularity, even before they met up in the arena, put pressure on the Capitol to inject some hope into their story. However, true to spectacle form, this rule change was only a marketing ploy, a lie told to give the audience, both in the Capitol and the Districts, false hope. Changing the rule back, when Katniss and Peeta are the last two standing, thrills the Capitol with a dramatic twist while also sending the message to the Districts that any hope of appealing to Capitol sympathies is futile. Katniss refuses to submit to the pressure of the spectacle and kill the boy she's come to care for. This is what prompts Katniss to pull out the poisonous berries and threaten joint suicide, which would leave the Capitol without a victor

and therefore without a spectacle to maintain—and as the show must go on, the head Gamemaker allows the pair to live, officially changing the rules.

Of course, this still comes at a cost. Katniss and Peeta are alive, but the spectacle of the star-crossed lovers from District 12 lives on. Katniss' feelings for Peeta, while internally earnest but uncertain, are continuously marketed to the public as a dizzying romance. And so begins Katniss' realization that despite her desire to opt out of participating in spectacle culture, she'll never truly be able to. She may have fought spectacle with spectacle, but either way, the spectacle won.

However, even within the Capitol's gaze, the spectacle of Katniss and Peeta remains subversive through its last remaining element of innocent "child's play": it's rated PG. Katniss and Peeta don't go farther than kissing, and she never mentions feeling pressured to perform sexually. The innocence of their newfound love, juxtaposed with the violence and suffering occurring outside the cave, makes a more compelling and sympathetic story than a sexually explicit one. Katniss and Peeta's appeal is in their innocence, as their audience craves declarations of love, not acts of lust: "My instincts tell me Haymitch isn't just looking for physical affection, he wants something more personal" (Collins 2008:300). Katniss' sexuality remains marketable as long as she remains sexually pure and chaste. Even when Katniss wins the games, Cinna dresses her in "an unassuming yellow dress" (Collins 2008:354), a "calculated look" (Collins 2008:355) that emphasizes Katniss' youth rather than her curves. Katniss observes: "I look, very simply, like a girl. A young one. Fourteen at most. Innocent. Harmless. Yes, it is shocking that Cinna has pulled this off when you remember I've just won the Games" (Collins 2008:355). While

they are expected to murder other children their age, sex is out of the question. They cross plenty of other moral lines, but sex is a trigger they do not pull.

It goes along with Katniss' characterization to reject a narrative of lust in favor of love. In the world of Hunger Games spectacle (and in today's society), lust goes hand in hand with objectification. Katniss has seen other tributes try and fail to win the games by presenting themselves one-dimensionally—lusting for sex, for blood, or perhaps both. Sex and violence are intimately connected in spectacle culture. *The Hunger Games* (both the book itself and its main event) replaces sex with violence as a symbol of maturity and coming of age. Instead of losing their virginity, a tribute loses their innocence by committing murder. It's a problematic parallel, framing sex as morally equivalent to murder, but in that context, it makes sense why Katniss wouldn't "pull the trigger." Yet the use of violence as a signifier or replacement for sex is a common phenomenon. In today's media, disturbing images of brutality and gore air on television and in PG-13 movies (like *The Hunger Games* film adaptation) while nudity and sex leads to an R rating and can't be aired on television, particularly when it involves female pleasure.

Regarding this inequality in media, it's important to note that gender plays a big role in Katniss' projected sexuality. Women are traditionally viewed in today's patriarchal society according to a virgin/whore dichotomy—and through Cinna's yellow dress, it's clear he aimed for the virgin look. Katniss may be a trained killer, but she must maintain an image of sexually purity in order to convey a general sense of innocence to the Capitol audience, one that also implies submission to Capitol authority after her rebellious act with the berries. A sexually deviant Katniss would



be perceived as more likely to intentionally incite a rebellion, and that to show such blatant disregard for Capitol authority would most certainly lead to punishment. Of course, this sexist notion of a connection between virginity and innocence, sexual activity and rebellion only applies to Katniss. It's different for a man: while Peeta's virgin status is the same as Katniss', his perceived virtue doesn't depend on it.

Sexuality is also key to understanding the actions of the Careers. While their lust for sex and violence signifies that the older Career tributes are more physically mature than Katniss, it also shows that they've lost their self-control, acting on their violently lustful urges and therefore unquestionably following the Capitol's status quo. They give everything to the spectacle—even, albeit posthumously, the ownership of their likeness, with their features reconfigured onto mutated animals for shock value. The connection between lust and assimilating to the spectacle is emphasized by the fact that Glimmer, the Career girl from District 1 who wore a see-through dress to her interview, is the first “mutation” Katniss recognizes in the final battle. This is why Katniss doesn't have sex, even once she's out of the arena. If giving in to lust means giving into spectacle culture, she will not be complicit in her own dehumanization. Katniss always capitalizes on whatever agency she's allowed, as seen by how she performs for the Capitol but resists their attempts at complete objectification. Katniss could never have sex during the Games because in her mind, that would signify that she'd stopped resisting.

However, in the Capitol's eyes, for Katniss to have sex would actually mean the opposite. The Capitol's aversion to Katniss and Peeta having sex comes from the notion that sex is inherently rebellious. Teen sex represents resistance to authority,

a coming of age that allows young adults to take the power of reproduction into their own hands and, despite (or perhaps because of) their elders' protests, enthusiastically abuse it. Reproduction is significant not just in terms of parenthood, but in terms of reproducing the entire system and society for the next generation. During the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, the Capitol holds a monopoly on that power. Not only do they rob children from their parents, breaking the natural cycle of reproduction, but also they replace that cycle with a manufactured spectacle culture that operates on simple urges like lust or competitiveness rather than complex emotions like love and empathy. This affects both the privileged and the powerless: the Capitol audience remains numb to the moral realities of the Hunger Games, instead choosing to gleefully fawn over the star-crossed lovers or excitedly bet on whether they'd win, while the Districts are immobilized by the combination of fear for their loved one's safety and hope that they survive. The sadness and anger when their District tributes are killed quickly turns to fear that their loved one could be one of next year's victims. The cycle begins again: every year the spectacle continues, setting the terms for the Capitol's regime and keeping the Districts in line by never letting them forget it.

This is why Panem's spectacle culture replaces sex with violence. While both can be used as a vehicle of resistance, violence is much more easily appropriated by those in power, because of its destructive capabilities. However, sex represents creation. Because sexual reproduction begets children, it directly combats the purpose of the Hunger Games, which gains its power by killing them. Therefore, for Katniss and Peeta to go rogue and have premarital sex on camera would reclaim the

power of reproduction from the Capitol, and with that power the opportunity to establish new values and halt that cycle of violence. To have non-reproductive sex in the Games would certainly be rebellious enough, reclaiming the power of pleasure in such an intentionally miserable environment, but the threat of reproduction has more long-standing implications. Their love would start a new cycle—one filled with hope and faith in the next generation rather than despair for the lost of the last.

Of course, even without sex, this is exactly what happens anyway. As covered in the trilogy's final two books, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, Katniss and Peeta's stunt with the berries causes enough of a stir to spark an ultimately successful revolution and a restructuring of Panem's social and governmental order. Yet their rebellion is still ultimately wrapped up with the threat of sexual reproduction. In *Catching Fire*, Capitol audiences erupted in "accusations of injustice and barbarism and cruelty" (Collins 2009:256) over Peeta's (fabricated) revelation that Katniss was pregnant going into the Quarter Quell, infamously lamenting, "if it weren't for the baby" (Collins 2009:256). The thought of murdering a pregnant teenager and her unborn child was too much for even "the most Capitol-loving, Games-hungry, bloodthirsty person" (Collins 2009:256) to handle.

Yet it's important to note that even within this act of rebellion, Peeta still told a lie: the entire pregnancy story was a complete fabrication, as Katniss and Peeta were never even married. Once again, the star-crossed lovers from District 12 fight spectacle with spectacle. In *Mockingjay*, after Katniss escapes the arena and joins the rebellion—and is noticeably *not* pregnant—the rebels cover Peeta's lie with one of their own, saying that she's "[b]een in recovery" from a "[m]iscarriage" (Collins

2010:87). This is the nature of spectacle culture: it absorbs its resistance. Still, Katniss refers to Peeta's pregnancy announcement as "a bomb of truth" (Collins 2009:256). Even if it wasn't from his own lived experience, the Capitol audience needed to empathize with the District parents who are forced to watch their children die in the Games, the fear of "[e]very parent in every district in Panem" (Collins 2009:257). It wasn't Peeta or Katniss' personal truth, but it was still a truth nonetheless—a marginalized perspective previously ignored by spectacle culture. This is what the reproduction of new cultural values looks like. With the declaration of sexual reproduction, responding to the Capitol's threat of death with a threat of life, Peeta reclaimed the power of reproduction in general, and with it, the power to change the future.

However, even within the context of the Capitol's Games—both the 74<sup>th</sup> in *The Hunger Games* and the Quarter Quell in *Catching Fire*—Katniss and Peeta remain sexually pure. Even Peeta's false announcement of Katniss' pregnancy is preceded with a qualifier that they were secretly married first. It's only when Katniss starts working with the District 13 rebels in *Mockingjay* that she is unambiguously offered the chance of public sexual impurity—"Do you want [Gale] presented as your new lover?" (Collins 2010:39). She's a rebel now, and premarital sex and illicit lovers go hand in hand with Plutarch's propaganda about overthrowing the government. This option becomes available to her only in an explicitly anti-authoritarian context. It never would have been allowed by the Capitol.

Yet the option of “present[ation]” is still there. If Panem is a nation built on spectacle, it only follows that the ultimate battle would be fought on television, not on the ground: and Katniss is the rebel’s most valuable weapon. Even in the rebellion against the Capitol and all it stands for, the spectacle never truly goes away. Only its values and apparatuses change. Katniss turns down the illicit lover angle, but the rebel leaders in District 13 are still propping her up in the spotlight for their own agenda—“something the Capitol would do” (Collins 2010:77).

Yet this time, Katniss is afforded more agency. Knowing her importance, she confidently exchanges an official pardon for Peeta for her agreement to be the Mockingjay. They film her behaving heroically in loud, explosive settings, like shooting down a Capitol bomber, and in more quiet, intimate settings, such as singing a song her father taught her by the lake he used to bring her to. The cameras are just as omnipresent as the Capitol’s, yet unlike the Hunger Games spectacle, it’s her authenticity they’re packaging: “Every time we coach her or give her lines, the best we can hope for is okay. It has to come from her. That’s what people are responding to” (Collins 2010:76).

What does it mean, then, to package authenticity? Katniss notes that she “perform[s] well only in real-life circumstances” (Collins 2010:76)—an oxymoron, as she can’t fake “real-life.” What makes this “performance” different is that it comes from a very different place with a very different goal. Former Gamemaker and head of rebel propaganda Plutarch Heavensbee says it’s “so effective” because it’s “straight from the heart” (Collins 2010:119). Katniss doesn’t plan ahead or follow any sort of internal script. She just lets her unfiltered emotions flow. Now, instead of

carefully calculating her appeal to the superficial Capitol citizens buy her food or medicine, she's emotionally appealing to the Districts, poor people like her who have also suffered during the war, to "remind [them] why they're fighting" (Collins 2010:109). The implications of "packaged authenticity" are complex: Katniss is no longer fabricating a performance, but the response to it is carefully calculated. Katniss' emotions are not for sale, but they are packaged. The clips are edited, with sad or triumphant music added in the background to further stimulate the audience's emotional response. It's certainly closer to "real life," but it's not quite there. As Katniss ponders "who's in charge, [her] commander or [her] director" (Collins 2010:275), it's clear she's come to realize that even as a rebel of spectacle culture, she'll never truly escape it. While she may find agency within it, through being able to bargain for Peeta, or helping inspire the District rebels, she'll always remain a part of spectacle culture, never truly able to reach an uncorrupted state of authenticity.

Spectacle is a distortion of reality. It's the viewing of the world through a manipulative lens. However, the reason a spectacle can never exist completely unskewed is simply because of its limited physical standpoint: a camera can only capture images within its field of view. The presence of cameras unavoidably influences one's "Action!" (Collins 2010:275), yet that doesn't mean what follows is necessarily fabricated. The deaths broadcast by the Hunger Games were real. Katniss' emotions in the propaganda clips were genuine. After all, as the spectacle projects an imitation of reality, it simultaneously exists *within* it. It's incredibly different to divorce the two. It's also such a powerful construct that it can never

truly disappear, only change its form. It's inescapable. It survives life, death, and regime after regime. In *Mockingjay*, when Katniss and the rebels work to take the Capitol, she watches her team die one by one—yet the cameraman and director survive. Plutarch Heavensbee manages to go from Head Gamemaker under President Snow to secretary of communications of the new government. When the war is over, he has the following exchange with Katniss: "Maybe this will be it, Katniss...The time it sticks. Maybe we are witnessing the evolution of the human race. Think about that.' And then he asks me if I'd like to perform on a new singing program he's launching in a few weeks" (Collins 2010:379). The spectacle never ends—but at least it's evolving to stop glorifying murder.

So *The Hunger Games* trilogy ends with a transformed, but not eradicated, spectacle culture. Does it get better in the years to come? Katniss wasn't able to escape performing in the spectacle during the war, but was she finally liberated after returning to District 12? The answer is sadly no. More than 15 years later, in the Epilogue, an older Katniss reflects how the Games still follow her and Peeta, even now that they're raising a family: even her nightmares about the Games and the war that followed "won't ever really go away" (Collins 2010:390). The spectacle never ends. Katniss explains that "they teach about [the Games] at school, and the girl knows we played a role in them" (Collins 2010:389). It's that key word, "role," that indicates that Katniss is permanently saddled with her status as performer. Even years after the fact, the Hunger Games are taught, and Katniss is a key character. She's still a part of its spectacle. She's also under pressure to perform for her children when she eventually tells them her side of the story. Katniss, who went

from embracing agency as a performer, to wanting out of the spectacle entirely, and finally to recognizing that escape was impossible, continues to find herself within its confines. She has agency, sure, and that's certainly reassuring, but it's clear that true liberation from spectacle culture would require a very different kind of rebellion than she was a part of.

What would another rebellion against spectacle culture look like? Published the year after *The Hunger Games* trilogy concluded, Veronica Roth's *Divergent* follows a similar sixteen-year-old female protagonist struggling to survive within a dystopian spectacle culture. However, while Katniss finds agency as a performer, Tris' strategy is very different: she resists internally rather than externally. As a result, does Tris find more or less agency within spectacle culture than Katniss? How does her role affect her methods of reproduction? Does she succeed in liberation, or, as in *The Hunger Games*, does spectacle culture survive?



**“If It’s In My Head, I Control It.” Or Does She?:**

**Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* Trilogy and the Internalization of Spectacle Culture**

In Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* trilogy, protagonist Tris Prior, like the aforementioned Katniss Everdeen, works to resist her dystopian society’s spectacle culture. However, Tris isn’t so much intentionally performing for physical cameras, but is still under a much more invasive form of surveillance. A hallucination serum allows her Faction leaders to observe inside her own mind. Tris may thus be seen as representing the internalization of spectacle culture, as her head literally becomes a spectacular setting and a constant battleground for agency against authoritarian messaging.

Tris lives in dystopian Chicago, its population divided into separate Factions based on shared values and personality types. However, unbeknownst to the Factions until the third book, *Allegiant*, Chicago is a social experiment, designed and monitored by the outside Bureau for Genetic Welfare. This is all part of an attempt to undo the United States’ failed attempt at eugenics by breeding the altered, or “genetically damaged” genes out of the general population over time within the insulated city. The Faction system was set up by the Bureau as an attempt at “behavioral modification” to contain and harness the best of those whose genes were altered to be particularly smart, selfless, honest, kind, or brave. Those who are “genetically pure” are Divergent: because their genes are no longer designed to favor any one particular trait, they don’t receive a single result on their Faction aptitude test, and are resistant to many of the Factions’ mind-altering serums. This

resistance is encoded into their DNA as a genetic marker to signify their Divergent status to Bureau observers without having to be genetically tested.

Tris Prior is Divergent, and this gives her the ability to fight back against the internalization of spectacle culture. She first finds agency in this ability, as her resistance to the serums means that when the Dauntless leaders turn their population into a mind-controlled, thoughtless army, she is immune and able to work to thwart their plans. After teaming up with her mentor and love interest, fellow Divergent Four, their combined powers as Divergents threaten both sexual and societal reproduction, making Tris even more threatening to her oppressors in both the Factions and the Bureau who seek to have total control of the progression of society. However, while she is able to defeat the figureheads of her spectacle culture, she is never able to gain freedom from the spectacle itself. Throughout the series, Tris struggles to resist internalizing spectacle culture. She is, for the most part, successful at finding the right amount of agency within it to help her cause, yet even when the spectacle isn't literally playing out within her mind, Tris is still susceptible to the values imposed upon her. In her final act of rebellion, Tris merely turns these values against her oppressors instead of stepping outside of their paradigms altogether. Like Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, Tris ultimately learns that while she may be allotted some degree of agency, she can never escape the confines of spectacle culture—resistance against the system must ultimately occur within it.

Tris is unable to escape spectacle culture for several reasons. First, as seen through the Factions' use of serums to control its population, its population has deeply internalized its complex messages. This is an intentional effect of the

spectacle. The Faction leaders aren't concerned with controlling actions. Instead, they prefer to control one's entire subjectivity: and people can never truly escape themselves. (Except, of course, through death, which is how Tris ultimately finds her way out). Secondly, trying to escape spectacle culture is an infinitely uphill battle: there are seemingly endless layers to it. Tris manages to conquer Dauntless' fear simulation, but still must grapple with spectacle influence in the "real world" of the Faction system. Then, when the Faction system crumbles, Tris illegally escapes past the city's surrounding fence, but all she finds on the other side is yet another oppressive group of leaders who have been utilizing spectacle culture all along as a means to control the Factions. Everything that made her special inside the fence is revealed to be a result of her genetic marker, a fabrication in its own right. She learns that the population of Chicago has not one, but two layers of spectacle culture controlling them: first the Faction leaders, and then the Bureau. It's just that until *Allegiant*, nobody in Chicago (including the Faction leaders) had any idea of the Bureau's existence. Therefore, who's to say that there's not another layer of spectacle culture beyond even them? (There is. The Bureau is only one organization of an entire nation that discriminates against the genetically damaged). Finally, if Tris cannot escape spectacle culture, it therefore follows that any resistance to it must be contained within it, although this is a certainly a self-perpetuating cycle. Tris has agency, but her options for resistance are limited. Like Katniss, she can resist, but although only through the means by which the system(s) allow.

Tris' home at the start of the series, the Factions, utilize spectacle culture through their mind-altering serums, most notably the microchip-laced hallucination

serum, used for the aptitude tests and Dauntless initiation: “The brain’s electrical activity is...transmitted to our computer, which then translates your hallucination into a simulated image that I can see and monitor” (Roth 2011:231-232). In Dauntless initiation, the hallucination serum is used to create a “fear landscape,” a virtual simulation triggered by the serum designed to allow initiates to conquer their subconscious fears within their minds, and live up to the Dauntless value and standard for bravery. However, this is not a private experience. While it occurs inside one’s mind, it is observed by the Faction leaders. This is the first layer of spectacle culture Tris must grapple with: in Dauntless, spectacle culture is quite literally internalized.

Like Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, when under the hallucination serum, Tris is the object under surveillance. However, the Factions’ spectacle culture values genuine thought control, as opposed to Panem’s preoccupation with performance. While President Snow didn’t seem to care whether or not Katniss genuinely loved Peeta or not—he just wanted her to continue acting like she did—Tris’ Faction leaders aren’t concerned with her actions, just her thoughts. Four explains the rationale behind the Factions’ preoccupation with internalization: “They don’t want you to act a certain way. They want you to *think* a certain way. So you’re easy to understand. So you won’t pose a threat to them” (Roth 2011:312). But the hallucination serum doesn’t just serve to let the Faction leaders observe initiates’ thoughts. It also helps *control* them.

It’s traumatic, being forced to repeatedly re-experience one’s worst fears. It could easily lead to anger at those who forced this torture upon them. However, by

ensuring that the danger within the simulation—the fears—are constructed by the initiate, the Faction leaders keep the heat off themselves. Instead of viewing the leaders as their direct opposition (although they may still explicitly fear them, as Tris does), when it comes to the simulation, the initiates are their own worst enemy. Intense fear of a regime can inspire rebellion, which is why the Dauntless leaders manipulate their subjects into redirecting that fear unto themselves and their own limitations before all else. We see this with Four, who “keep[s] going in [his fear landscape]” a full two years after his initiation, despite the fact that he “ha[sn’t] made any progress” (Roth 2011:333). Not only is the spectacle internalized, but the initiate’s anger at their oppression is redirected against themselves. In doing so, the spectacle works to constitute the initiates’ subjectivities, breeding a culture of self-loathing rather than one of rebellion, and inspiring a drive to conquer fears instead of a drive to better society.

The use of fear—as opposed to desire or another more pleasurable or positive emotion—best suits the goals of the Factions’ spectacle culture because blurring the line between fabrication and reality only intensifies that particular emotion. If reality is defined as physical (as opposed to internal) occurrences free of any sensory manipulation or fabrication, the “fear landscape” certainly isn’t real. Yet those under the influence of the serum believe it is. The hallucination is a nightmare, and the initiates’ fear is rooted in the belief that it’s truly, physically happening. This is partially why the serum is so effective: it draws from within, and whether dream or reality, you can never truly escape yourself. Of course, this focus on the self doesn’t necessarily mean that the subject has much power. The concept of the

landscape itself reminds the initiates that the Faction leaders have the power to control their perceived reality, and that they also hold the key to the relief of waking up. The lines between fabricated hallucination, personal nightmare, and physical reality are blurred, and those unsure of reality are easily manipulated by a convincing falsehood. The Dauntless take advantage of this vulnerability, using the population's perception of reality to control them.

However, this level of control isn't enough for the Faction leaders. They also want to take away the population's power to distort the leaders' perception in return. Setting the spectacle inside a subject's mind gives them a raw reaction: it's unaltered, and therefore "real." Within this internal, fabricated, and false reality, there is seemingly no room for the subject to filter their reaction. Essentially, because this spectacle is internal, there isn't an opportunity to perform like Katniss did in the Hunger Games. Katniss had to think on her feet, but she still had the physical time and space to calculate how she wanted to present herself, as her internal emotions and external performance didn't necessarily align. However, with the induced hallucinations, there is no external performance: it's all about those raw, internal feelings.

As a result of their faith in the value of these internal reactions, the Faction leaders don't trust physicality as an accurate representation of reality. Tris overhears her superiors talking: "Combat training shows you nothing. The simulations, however, reveal who the Divergent rebels are, if there are any, so we will have to examine the footage several times to be sure" (Roth 2011:276). This insight into the Faction leaders' mindset shows that they believe that physical

performance (for example, the combat training during Dauntless initiation) is itself a manipulation of reality, and that only the internal simulations can be trusted as accurate and authentic. Yet the simulations are still viewed through “footage”: it may be someone’s raw reaction, but it is still viewed through the limits of a computer screen. Film isn’t necessarily a medium that can capture someone’s full range of thoughts and emotions; all the Dauntless leaders are getting is a raw reaction, viewed over and over. The subject’s reaction may be genuine, but it doesn’t tell the whole story. The Dauntless leaders speak in terms of possibilities—“if there are any,” “to be sure.” Their dependence on accuracy of one’s reaction to the serums has inadvertently led them to doubt the physical world around them. Even if they’re not under the hallucination themselves, they still fall victim to the spectacle culture of uncertainty they’ve created—a testament to the spectacle’s power.

What are the implications, then, for someone Divergent to resist the hallucination serum and be “aware, when they are in a simulation, that what they are experiencing is not real” (Roth 2011:257)? This takes away the spectacles’ fear-inducing power of uncertainty. Empowered by the firm realization that they’re hallucinating, Divergents have the ability to “manipulate the simulation or even shut it down” (Roth 2011:257). As the simulations are designed to further the Faction leaders’ power by making a spectacle out of Tris’ deepest fears, her Divergence gives her the ability to manipulate the simulation and therefore use the spectacle against itself. She is therefore allotted a kind of agency within the hallucinations that the non-Divergent population, including the Faction leaders, could never attain. Her ability to recognize that the simulation is a fabricated spectacle allows her to step

outside the realm of uncertainty: she can tell that a simulation isn't really happening, even though she shouldn't be able to. While she can't step outside of the spectacle altogether—she is, after all, still trapped in the simulation—she still understands how it works, and therefore knows how to exploit it. She first realizes this when practicing the fear landscape with Four, finding herself trapped in a water tank: “*Don’t panic...The simulation is all in your head...I scream, and water fills my mouth. If it’s in my head, I control it...I scream again and shove the wall with my palm*” (Roth 2011:254). She breaks down the glass, and the hallucination comes to an end.

“*If it’s in my head, I control it.*” This is how Tris reclaims her own head as a space of her own—no longer a fearful, passive object of the fear simulation spectacle, Tris becomes an active agent within it, imagining an alternate fabrication that works in her favor and breaking of the tank—a metaphor for breaking out of the simulation’s paradigm of helplessness while the all-surrounding spectacle culture attempts to drown her. Escaping the tank shows her ability to resist the hallucination, indicating her power within this particular layer of the spectacle. (It’s therefore significant, then, that Tris is later put in a *real* water tank, showing that her Divergent mind powers won’t help her escape the next layer of spectacle culture in the real world.) Instead of facing her fear and calming herself down, as she was supposed to, she manufactured the option to run from her fear instead. This was a rebellious decision, as the alleged point of the fear simulations is to learn to conquer them. Social critics Steven Best and Douglas Kellner explain that “the concept of the spectacle...involves a distinction between passivity and activity and consumption



and production” (Best and Kellner), and here we see Tris choosing to play the role of producer rather than consumer. She may still be a part of the spectacle, but if it’s occurring inside her head, why should the Faction leaders have all the power? Taking some of that power for herself is an act of resistance.

Through this act of resistance, the text works to “[condemn] passive consumption of spectacle as an alienation from human potentiality for creativity and imagination” (Best and Kellner). *“If it’s in my head, I control it”* acts as a parallel to modern-day resistances to spectacle culture within capitalist society. For example, recognizing the psychology of advertisement can empower potential consumers to resist their subtle and subliminal messaging. Both the simulations and modern day advertisements are based on the assumption that consumer remains unaware of the psychological manipulation at play. If the façade is revealed, it’s no longer “subliminal.” Consumers like Tris are then able to build up the appropriate defenses and resistance to these manipulations now that they know what they’re dealing with. They’ll never escape advertisements, but don’t have to be completely powerless to them. In spectacle culture, knowledge is power, and Tris’ Divergence gifts her with that knowledge. This knowledge gives her agency within the system, an agency that allows her to have the “creativity” and “imagination” that Best and Kellner refer to—manifesting in her re-imagining of the simulations, and her ability to think beyond the fear landscape’s original paradigms.

Yet it’s important to note that Tris is still inside the hallucination spectacle. Even though she was able to play a more active role within it, she’s still trapped within its bounds. After all, Four is observing her fear landscape—and this is how he

discovers her secret. Having been inside her head, he isn't fooled when Tris tries to feign ignorance:

Don't play stupid[...]I suspected it last time, but this time it's obvious. You manipulated the simulation; you're Divergent! I'll delete the footage, but unless you want to wind up *dead* at the bottom of the chasm, you'll figure out how to hide it during the simulations! (Roth 2011:255)

This is an important wake up call for Tris, who, while empowered to break the glass in that short moment during the simulation, was not fully cognizant of what she was doing—"I didn't know that was an act of Divergence. How did he?" (Roth 2011:256). The agency she gained within the simulation was minimal in comparison to the force of the spectacle's imposition of uncertainty. She "[doesn't] know" (Roth 2011:255) how she broke the glass. However, this only affirms the fact that in order for Tris to take advantage of the limited agency she's afforded, she needs to gain more intricate knowledge of how the spectacle works.

The trilogy, in part, explores the different degrees of agency the spectacle allows Tris within various contexts, particularly regarding the influence of different serums. While Dauntless' hallucination serum has the power to insert the spectacle into her head, their mind control serum has no effect on her at all. She is entirely immune. However, even though she isn't "brain dead like the rest of them" (Roth 2011:418), she is limited in other ways. She must still pretend to be one of the aforementioned "brain dead" or risk being found out as Divergent and subsequently killed. While this act does entail producing a performance, for a time Tris is simultaneously a passive participant, keeping to the status quo to avoid detection, like when Faction leader Eric uses her as an example to explain how the mind control serum works:

“Oh, they can see and hear. They just aren’t processing what they see and hear the same way,” says Eric. “They receive commands from our computers in the transmitters we injected them with...” At this, he presses his fingers to the injection site to show the woman where it is. Stay still, I tell myself. Still, still, still. “...and carry them out seamlessly.” (Roth 2011:423-4)

Tris does have free will in this scenario, especially compared to those under mind-control. The non-Divergent Dauntless population have lost all their agency entirely becoming passive “brain dead” zombies who live to follow orders. It’s an extreme representation of what it means to completely internalize the spectacle. In a capitalist society, internalizing spectacle certainly leads people to follow its demand that they become avid consumers, fighting each other for resources—not entirely unlike the army the Dauntless became. The Dauntless army serves as a warning. The spectacle has the power to manipulate people to do terrible things they’d never do otherwise had they had the option. It makes them military agents in service of the spectacle, working to increase its power (even if that’s not what they want to do). It foreshadows Tris’ eventual surrender to the spectacle in *Allegiant*, where she opts to manipulate others’ minds simply because it was the lesser of the two evil options she was given. Sometimes, that’s what agency means: the option to choose between two undesirable options.

The sheer domination of spectacle culture means that agency will most certainly be limited within it, especially at moments like the one mentioned above, but that doesn’t mean Tris can’t work to push those limitations, and take the opportunity to exploit all the agency she possibly can. It’s difficult to find agency when spectacle culture is imposed from childhood, but even in its limited capacity, Tris found a way. On the first book’s very first page, she explains how her home

Faction, Abnegation, expects her to perfect “the art of losing herself,” but she admits she isn’t “well practiced” in it (Roth 2011:1). To “practice” is a choice—Tris resisted, in some small way, against this absorption into spectacle culture even before she discovered her resistance to any serums. Her home Faction’s focus on selflessness may have fortified her internal defense mechanisms, as her self-evaluation was always internal rather than external.

Tris wasn’t raised to be particularly concerned with her own physicality. Mirrors were severely restricted in Abnegation because they were thought to breed vanity: “Our faction allows me to stand in front of [the mirror] on the second day of every third month, the day my mother cuts my hair” (Roth 2011:1). Growing up in a Faction that expects its members to “lose themsel[ves]” (Roth 2011:1) may be the reason that “many children who are raised Abnegation receive [the Divergent] result” (Roth 2011:186) on the aptitude test. However, the reasons why remain a mystery to the Faction leaders. After all, Tris never truly internalized Abnegation’s teachings, perhaps an early sign of her being “one of the strongest Divergent” (Roth 2012:328). She “stare[s] at [her]self” (Roth 2011:2) as her mother cuts her hair, and admits to “curiosity” at her appearance. Tris is immediately introduced as someone who actively resists her society’s attempts at thought control, as even with the knowledge that it’s frowned upon, she still makes the choice to “stare.” Although right from the start, her form of rebellion, while a deliberate choice, is still a manifestation of the spectacle.

Choices, it seems, are key to the Divergent experience. The will to resist is just as important as the ability to. This is perhaps as a result of the Divergent genetic

code, as it could be that the genes giving Tris immunity to the serums have to be activated by the environment to work (the environment, in this case, being Tris' body, the genes activating or remaining dormant depending on her emotional state). Tris doesn't always choose to resist, and this is why she doesn't show immunity to every serum she's exposed to. While she does overcome the Candor truth serum and survive exposure to the Erudite death serum, she is still greatly affected by the Amity mood serum in the first part of *Insurgent*. Suspicious of this phenomenon herself, Tris and Four come to the conclusion that "[m]aybe in order to fight off a serum, you have to *want* to" (Roth 2012:68). This highlights the notion that even when one is given agency in spectacle culture, one won't necessarily make the choice to resist it. It's easier for Tris to give in to the mood serum and "forget about anger[...]about pain" (Roth 2012:68). Tris understands that her relaxed, euphoric mood isn't a result of her own genuine happiness, and recognizes that she's been manipulated by the spectacle's illusion. Yet resistance is still a difficult choice.

Resistance entails intense intellectual—and often physical—labor. For example, it takes considerable effort to directly resist the Candor serum, but in a more general sense, it's hard to make choices for oneself when the path used to always be predetermined. It entails sacrifice: choosing to leave home, for example, or dying for the cause. It's not just about finding the opportunity for agency. It's about taking advantage of that opportunity to the best of one's abilities. This can mean traveling into the unknown, rejecting the status quo and pursuing a non-beaten path without the guidance of a spectacle script. Most importantly, working against the dominant culture can also mean working alone. The night Dauntless

used the mind-control serum, for all Tris knew, she was the only one who could do anything to stop it. Sticking to the status quo may mean upholding existing power structures, but it can also mean finding bliss in willful ignorance, safe from the risks and free from the pressures that come with starting a revolution. For Tris to keep choosing to continue resisting the Faction leaders and rebel against their spectacle culture is not only brave, it's incredibly physically and emotionally taxing. This is a simple but effective way that spectacle culture works to keep people compliant: it's an uphill battle not to be. In her resistance against each new layer of spectacle culture, Tris' choices never stop being difficult.

However, with her instructor and boyfriend Four by her side, Tris has faith in her mission and hope for the future, as they choose to rebel against their dystopian spectacle culture together. Even her decision to refer to him by his given name, Tobias, represents their anti-spectacle aspirations: the nickname "Four" was given in response to Tobias' fear landscape, as it revealed he had a record low number of fears. While his other friends continue to call him "Four" throughout the series, Tris does not, rejecting the name that glorifies spectacle values in favor one that fosters intimacy between them.

They're stronger together. It's easier to develop a counter-spectacle script as a team than in isolation. Tris' revolutionary actions become all the more threatening to the Faction leaders once she and Four join forces. As in *The Hunger Games*, their budding sexuality smacks of rebellion. The thought of young adults having sex is unsettling in to the various authority figures throughout the *Divergent* series for the same reason it is in today's society: it carries the threat of reproduction. Sex and

reproduction cannot be divorced from each other. Even sex without the intention of reproduction is, strangely enough, threatening *because* of this lack of intent. It's a threat to the current system either way.

Tris and Four, however, intend for reproduction of a different kind. They aren't trying to have children—they aren't even having sex—but together, they are formulating a new groundwork for their society. As in *The Hunger Games*, this constitutes a form of reproduction because Tris and Four want to change the oppressive spectacle cycles that tear families apart and instill harmful values in its children. At first, they want to reproduce a society that while not necessarily liberated from Factions, is free from the oppressive forces (namely, Erudite leader Jeanine Matthews and her Dauntless allies) who've murdered Divergent, attacked Abnegation, and kept important information hidden from Faction citizens. However, after Jeanine's death at the end of *Insurgent*, inter-faction conflict is no longer their primary concern, having moved onto resisting the next layer of the spectacle (without ever truly conquering the last). In *Allegiant*, the new goal becomes to liberate Chicago from the control of their spectators at the Bureau for Genetic Welfare, establishing a new value system in the Bureau that keeps them from meddling in Chicago's affairs.

In *Insurgent*, the two work together to release what Jeanine was hiding, "the information that will change everything" (Roth 2012:522). It's a message from the Factions' founders, heavily guarded for generations "to keep [the Factions] all ignorant and safe and *inside the fence*" (Roth 2012:524)—essentially, to preserve the Factions' spectacle culture. What the video reveals is that the city of Factions has

been isolated from a post-apocalyptic outside world, ravaged by what “human nature[...]has become” (Roth 2012:23) and that within the city, “[o]nce [Divergent] become abundant[...]the Factions] may emerge from their isolation” (Roth 2012:524). This message was delivered by a woman named Edith Prior: Tris’ ancestor. Tris is the product of generations of reproduction, and after her parents’ deaths and her brother’s betrayal, it’s up to her to carry on the line (of communication).

At first Edith’s message seems to indicate that there could be a new way to fight the Factions’ spectacle culture: from the outside. It’s assumed that physically leaving the Factions will entail escape from spectacle culture, but unfortunately, the other side of the fence just adds a new layer to Chicago’s spectacle. When the information is released, the Factions enter a new state of disorder—an incubation period—before Tris and Four finally liberate the city from the control of those outside the fence via a very different form of reproduction: the erasure and replacement of memories.

In order to forge the future, Tris and Four must rewrite the past, and by doing so beget a new collective memory stemming from their newly instilled community values. Just as Peeta brought the marginalized District perspective to life with his pregnancy announcement, provoking empathy from the Capitol audience and changing their selfish spectacle values, Tris and Four are drawing out similar empathy from their own oppressors—only they’re doing it with serum rather than rhetoric. Thought control has always been a goal of spectacle culture (and the memory serum has been used in individual cases before) but an explicit,



unambiguous rewriting of a collective group's memory is an extreme measure.

Certainly, in the modern world, propaganda can be used to serve this same end, but a certain amount of agency through freedom of interpretation is allotted in those situations. By using the memory serum, Tris and Four bestow no such luxury.

This plot plays out at the Bureau for Genetic Welfare at the end of *Allegiant*. The revelations of the trilogy's final novel make clear why the coupling and possible sexual reproduction of two people presumed Divergent would be so revolutionary in their dystopian society. After Tris, Four, and several friends escape beyond the fence, they are met by the Bureau, the group of scientists who established the Factions generations ago and have been studying them ever since, monitoring the city through its hidden security cameras. The Factions were set up as an isolated social experiment in response to the nation's outbreak of genetic manipulations gone wrong. Genes were altered to make people smarter, braver, kinder, more honest, and more selfless, but this resulted in a population lacking in other areas: compassion, fear, motivation, tact, self-preservation. Set in what used to be Chicago, the Factions were designed to group people based on their altered genes and "wait[...]for the generations to pass, for each one to produce more genetically healed humans[...]the Divergent[...]‘Divergent’ means that [Tris’s] genes are healed" (Roth 2013:124-125). In a society designed with the intention for sexual reproduction to produce Divergents, Tris and Four would be an ideal match to continue to pass on those genes. However, if the resurgence of Divergence was the Bureau's intention, their plans weren't executed properly. It's a flawed system, as grouping genetically similar people together isn't likely to encourage mixture among gene pools. Tris and

her friends may have been Faction transfers, but it's certainly more common to elect to stay. This may be why Divergents were so easily hunted down: their healed genes were a rarity in a society structured to discourage inter-faction relationships, and by extension, any resulting genetic diversity. Therefore, a dual-Divergent couple is likely a rare sight indeed, and would be expected to please rather than threaten the Bureau scientists.

However, this is not the case. Tris and Four's relationship continues to be a threat to the status quo, as the Bureau tests Four and finds that he isn't truly Divergent: "[s]ometimes people will be aware during simulations or be able to resist serums even if they still have damaged genes" (Roth 2013:171). Meanwhile, Tris has inherited her mother's "nearly perfect" genes (Roth 2013:153). In the eyes of the Bureau, for Tris to reproduce with Four risks throwing that all away: Four's "damaged" genes would pollute her own. Once again, a sexual relationship between Tris and Four is inherently rebellious, albeit for different reasons. The land outside the fence provides no relief from the pressures of spectacle culture. The discovery of the Bureau only showed just how far its reach extended, and how many layers of "simulations" Tris and Four had been acting in. They were a threat to the Faction leaders in the fear landscapes, but then the reality they thought they knew outside of that fabricated space was also a monitored fabrication of sorts. The civil unrest they helped spark within the city poses a threat to the success of the Bureau's experiment.

Even though Tris poses a threat to those in power, her time at the Bureau only reveals how susceptible she really is to authoritarian messages. She may be

able to work to transform the spectacle—by breaking the glass, or teaming up with Four to shut down the mind control device—but her acts of resistance will never lead to liberation. This is because, as the books explore, spectacle culture is internalized to such an extent that any resistance to it will ultimately operate within its confines. According to Guy Debord, author of *The Society of the Spectacle*,

The individual who has been more deeply marked by this impoverished spectacular thought than *by any other aspect of his experience*[...]will essentially follow the language of the spectacle, for it is the only one he is familiar with; the one in which he learned to speak. No doubt he would like to be regarded as an enemy of its rhetoric; but he will use its syntax. This is one of the most important aspects of spectacular domination's success.  
(Debord 31)

Tris exemplifies the effects of spectacle culture's most dominating machination. It's how she "learned to speak"; it taught her how to interact with the world around her. She's been internalizing its messages since her youth—certainly picking and choosing which ones suit her best, like choosing to "stare" at her reflection instead of relinquishing vanity, but every choice occurred within the confines of spectacle culture. Both vanity and losing herself were options presented to her by the spectacle, albeit through different models.

It's true that Tris, as a Divergent, has been "deeply marked by...spectacle thought" (Debord 31). Having stood outside of the hallucination spectacle, she was able to see its machinations more clearly than those it controlled. However, it's also important to remember the Bureau's reveal that her resistance to Faction serums was a spectacle itself: designed as a genetic marker so that onlookers could recognize her genetic purity. This means Tris' entire ability to resist is a product of spectacle culture. This doesn't mean she lacks agency—quite the opposite—but it

does indicate that the reason she has it in the first place is because spectacle culture gave it to her. This is why she'll never be able to escape it. Spectacle culture has so many layers, extending physically outward (from Chicago to the Bureau to beyond) *and* inward (into both her subjectivity and her literal DNA).

As a result, Tris' dystopian spectacle system is designed so that she must "use its syntax" (Debord 31) to attack it, therefore ensuring its preservation. Debord uses "syntax" to refer to the general language of the spectacle: not just its vocabulary, although that's certainly a part of it, but also its mechanisms and manifestations, its scripts and standards for how to live life. Tris is doomed to use this "syntax" in her rebellion, because even if she is an "enemy of [spectacle] rhetoric" (Debord 31), she will still fight back using the methods she's been taught: essentially, through a spectacle script. We saw this in *The Hunger Games*, when Katniss and the rebels fought Capitol propaganda by designing propaganda of their own. Like Katniss, Tris has agency within the spectacle to choose which of its scripts to follow, but what if she doesn't want a script at all? Her agency is truly limited. The spectacle allows resistance, but not liberation. Therefore, her revolution can only operate within spectacle parameters.

The most dramatic example of this comes at the climax of *Allegiant*, in her final act of rebellion. To save her home city from the influence of the Bureau's memory serum in its plans to shut down the experiment, Tris proposes they use the Bureau's own weapons against it: "Memory serum[...]That's how they're planning to rest the experiments. But we could reset *them*" (Roth 2013:382). The moral implications of this decision don't go unnoticed by Four: "Wait. You really want to

erase the memories of a whole population against their will? That's the same thing *they're* planning to do to our friends and family" (Roth 2013:383). Here, Tris chooses to fight spectacle with spectacle, using the Bureau's memory serum against it when she discovers it plans to use it on Chicago. The conflict between the Factions is no longer a major concern—perhaps that spectacle culture has been written off as a lost cause—but Tris and Four determine that they need to liberate Chicago from the control of the Bureau. Of course, that means transferring power between one manifestation of spectacle culture to another. By erasing and rewriting the Bureau residents' memories, Tris and Four are reproducing rather than dismantling the spectacle. It's no accident then that Tris and Four consummate their relationship (albeit ambiguously) the night before they put their plan into action. It's also the last night they ever spend together—Tris is shot and killed just as she releases the memory serum. Therefore, her sexual union with Four begets a different kind of legacy: the "liberation" of Chicago from the oppressive experiments of the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, and the new memories instilled in the Bureau's residents. Tris' death marks her complete internalization of spectacle culture, as even though she died to save the memories of her city, she also died an agent of the spectacle, ensuring that the culture of fabrications and uncertainty would live on for the next generation.

Overall, the *Divergent* series concludes that because each of the layers of spectacle culture are internalized by its subjects, deeply tied to their subjectivity and general navigation of the social world, it's therefore impossible to escape its influence. Resistance is possible, yet it can only be done within the confines of the

multilayered system and therefore can never truly bring one outside of it. Tris may have fought against the fear simulation, the mind-control simulation, and the system that engineered those fabrications, but she concludes her revolution by construction yet another oppressive fabrication in return. Instead of destroying the spectacle, she simply added yet another complex layer to it. Not only that, but she makes this fabrication of falsified memories the foundation for the future of Chicago. Is Chicago truly liberated, then, if it owes its existence to spectacle culture? From one manifestation of spectacle culture, yes, but never from spectacle culture entirely. Through the example of Chicago, the texts argue that there is no escape once trapped within the clutches of spectacle culture. As any form of revolution or resistance must occur within its constraints, the spectacle will inevitably reproduce itself.

Despite giving it her best shot, Tris never escapes. She breaks out of the glass, but is still observed in the simulation. She's immune to the mind-control serum, but is hunted down because of it. She physically escapes the Factions, only to find that an even scarier spectacle society exists outside of it, and has been pulling the strings all along. She begets a new value system at the Bureau, but does so by becoming an agent of the spectacle. Even in death, Tris' memory becomes a spectacle itself, the object of her boyfriend's grief. It's a bleak ending from a feminist perspective, as the spectacle (of both *Allegiant* itself and Tris' posthumous trajectory) is now manifesting through Four's male gaze. The book's remaining chapters are told from Four's point of view, ending with an elaborate scattering of the ashes from a zip-line high above the city. Tris went from internalizing spectacle culture—her mind

confined by the constraints of the spectacle until her death—to posthumously becoming a spectacle herself. Her memory lives on, as do the memories she fabricated. That is her legacy. It's clear that the cycle of spectacle will continue, for better or worse, just as it did in Panem. Internalization of spectacle culture, it seems, begets a similarly bleak future to performing it.

Is there any role, then, within spectacle culture that could beget a future that, if not hopeful, is at least more open-ended? Is there a role that under the right circumstances could offer more agency than performance and internal resistance could? Lois Lowry's *The Giver* suggests that the role of spectator within spectacle culture could do just that.

**“The Capacity to See Beyond”:**

**The Power of the Spectator in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver***

In Lois Lowry’s 1993 novel *The Giver*, Jonas plays the role of spectator in his dystopian spectacle culture—it’s literally his assigned job. Jonas lives in the community, a society in which one person, called The Receiver, holds all of the group’s collective memories. Jonas is selected for this position in his twelfth year, and as time goes on begins to realize the power that comes with such knowledge: the power to either reproduce or put an end to the harmful spectacle system.

Like in *The Hunger Games*’ Panem and *Divergent*’s Chicago, it’s difficult in the community to decipher what’s real and what’s fabricated. This is because the community operates under Sameness—a genetic alteration that not only engineers people to have similar physical features, but also removes any sensory perception of other kinds of difference:

Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. Before my time, before the previous time, back and back and back. We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with difference[...]We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others. (Lowry 1993:95)

Sameness manifests as the neutralization of the senses: people are genetically designed to minimize physical differences among one another, people see in only black-and-white, fail to feel the sunshine on their skin, cannot hear the wondrous notes of music—and have no collective memory that these experiences ever existed. As in *Divergent*, Jonas’ dystopian society seeks to control its population through genetic alteration. Although this certainly eliminates the negative effects of racial difference, like prejudice and stereotyping, this seemingly utopian ideal is dystopian



in practice. As in the *Divergent* trilogy, genetic alteration serves to limit the community's agency by withholding information. As seen with Tris, in spectacle culture, knowledge is power. Therefore, by denying its population the ability to accurately interpret the world around them, the community is denying them access to knowledge. This works in conjunction with the community's withholding of any history of the time before the community came to be. Nobody remembers war, or starvation, or any other form of severe suffering, but they also don't know what it's like to feel joy or love. They don't even understand the concept of freedom. Unaware their perception is being manipulated, they don't recognize how constrained they are. By withholding memory, the spectacle pulls wool over everyone's eyes, keeping the community safe from suffering but unaware of the black-and-white cage that protects them.

Of course, Sameness also serves to keep the population's behavior in line through thought control, much like Dauntless hallucination serum. Without the "vibrance" (Lowry 1993:99) of difference, Sameness manifests as a very neutral existence. Deprived of the best—and worst—of sensory experiences, people are able to express superficial emotions, but never deeply feel. Sensory and emotional experiences are controlled by the same spectacle because they are implicitly connected: as Sameness dulls the senses, it also dulls emotions because the two inform one another. The feeling of sunshine or the beauty of a red rose can bring inspire joy, but if a body isn't equipped to take in those sensory experiences, they're prevented from feeling those emotions. On the flip side, emotions often impact the senses as well, physically manifesting in the body's sensory interpretation: for

example, favorite foods may not seem so tasty if we're feeling sad. Senses are also strongly connected to memories: a certain smell or sound can trigger powerful recollections of days past. The erasure of memory works hand in hand with sensory and emotional control, as sensory-induced nostalgia can trigger incredibly powerful emotions, which can lead people to base their thinking on the past rather than the present or future. Therefore, sensory, memory, and emotional control leads to a population that lives in the moment—floating through life *reacting* instead of thinking and feeling. This leads to very superficial emotions: for example, Jonas notes that his sister feels “impatience and exasperation” (Lowry 1993:132) rather than of deeply-rooted anger. This simplicity of feeling makes the population's behavior easily manageable, as the “evening telling of feelings” (Lowry 1993:4) ritual can easily resolve their uncomplicated emotions.

The passionless population is mostly docile, submissively complying with the community's regulations: accepting their assigned job at age twelve, wearing their hair in the designated fashion, and accepting society's rules and restrictions. There's very little room for individuality, and the Council of Elders either makes or facilitates all major life decisions. Serious emotions—like fear of death—are sanitized by the community's very vocabulary: death is ritualized and vaguely referred to as “release,” a benign term that keeps Jonas himself in the dark about its true meaning until the book's climax. Even the connotations of “love” are too complicated for the word to be used by the community. Positive as it may be, the general population can't feel that kind of complex emotion, and they don't remember a time when people ever could. On the flip side, Jonas notes that “[t]hey

*have never known pain*" (Lowry 1993:110). They may not know suffering, but they are dulled to everything else. Too docile to rebel and too ignorant to know that's even an option, the regulation of emotions and withholding of memory keeps the population under control.

What—or who—sustains this system? The community is led by its Council of Elders, which makes all of its major decisions, like assigning the Twelves to their lifelong jobs or approving applications for spousal assignment and children. The Council of Elders is certainly a governmental force, but unlike Katniss and Tris' dystopian leaders, it isn't orchestrating its population's spectacle. The people on the Council are also under the influence of Sameness. What are the implications of this very different authoritarian model? For one, this spectacle culture isn't anyone's tool. It's oppressing people, but no one in particular is explicitly benefiting from it: unlike Panem, it's anti-capitalist. It would be hard to know to whom to direct any act of rebellion. Of course, it's precisely because there's no authoritarian leader running the show that the spectacle remains virtually invisible to the population. As we saw in *Divergent*, if nobody understands the mechanisms of the spectacle, then nobody will be able to adequately resist.

The system of Sameness is inherently flawed, even on its own terms. If *everyone* in the community is denied the ability to feel powerful emotions or remember their history, even the leadership is denied the knowledge these experiences would provide. The longevity of Sameness depends on *someone* holding onto those memories, so that the knowledge stays in the community but contained in one place so that it doesn't corrupt the pacified population. This is where the

Receiver of Memory comes in. The Receiver is assigned to feel those powerful emotions in place of everyone else, protecting them from the pain of humanity's dark history while using knowledge of that history to advise the Council of Elders on major community decisions. The Receiver is the one and only spectator of the Community's story. They can't share their gifted information with any members of the general population, only "us[ing] the memories" to "advise" the council (Lowry 1993:103), which is still a rare event. This is the job Jonas is assigned. As the current Receiver is getting old, the time has come for him to transfer the memories to someone new. Jonas calls his new mentor the Giver, as it's now his job to "give" his collection of memories away. As the Giver's replacement, Jonas will "receive" these memories—hence his new job title.

As designated spectator, the Receiver lives a "life quite separate from that of the community" (Lowry 1993:160), as they themselves "cannot be observed," living "alone" and "apart" from everyone else (Lowry 1993:61). While in training, Jonas, still living at home, is prohibited from participating in the morning ritualized sharing of dreams. It's all about keeping the memories between him and the Giver. If he were to share a dream that stemmed from a memory, that would give his family indirect access to it, therefore threatening the spectacle of Sameness. Spectating is Jonas' job alone, because if people were to spectate upon him, they might start to appropriate his knowledge. As his thoughts, actions, and feelings may reveal too much, Jonas can no longer perform within any kind of spectacle. He is forever fated to simply observe, experience, and reflect on the memories he receives. It's a painful job, but the community depends on it. Without Jonas, the spectacle of Sameness

would crumble. In the world of *The Giver*, if a Receiver dies or leaves the community without transferring their Received memories to a replacement, some fantastical element returns these memories to the community, shattering Sameness' hold on them. The memories demand to be felt.

Sameness and the memories it keeps hidden are two sides of the same spectacle coin, but one cannot exist in the presence of the other. That is why the community's spectacle culture depends on Jonas to keep them in balance: Sameness needs someone to keep watch of the memories in order for to maintain the spectacle, but the more people who have access to them, the weaker Sameness' hold on the community. It's therefore strongest when just one person has access. This is true for Panem and Chicago's dystopian spectacles as well: their populations submitted to spectacle control in part because they didn't understand the mechanisms by which they were being manipulated. Of course, unlike in the community, Panem and Chicago's government leaders were initially the ones who held this integral knowledge. Katniss and Tris were able to defeat those leaders precisely because they gained access to it too. What does it mean that Jonas now holds that power? During the transition period between Receivers, *two* people currently have access to the community's memories, meaning that the spectacle is in a more fragile state. For Sameness to survive, it is vital that the memories be kept especially safe under Jonas' watchful eye.

A spectacle cannot survive without spectators. That's the very nature of spectacle itself—it exists to be watched, experienced, consumed. If someone doesn't remember an event or a feeling, than it may as well have never happened.

Therefore, the loss of that knowledge can have dangerous implications. Knowledge is power, and the community could not afford to sacrifice the power of their memories by letting them be forgotten. That is why the Giver tells Jonas that “here in this room, all alone, I re-experience [the memories] again and again. It is how wisdom comes. And how we shape our future” (Lowry 1993:78). It is also why if the Giver fails to transfer these memories before his death, they will disperse amongst the community. The knowledge must survive. However, this would throw off the spectacle’s delicate balance between the competing influence of Sameness and memory. Just as Sameness slowly lost its grip on Jonas when he began to receive the memories, the same thing would happen to the Community if the memories were to escape.

The Giver recalls how this has happened before, when Jonas’ predecessor, a Receiver-in-training ten years earlier, abandoned her post and applied for release, leaving her memories behind:

“When the new Receiver failed, the memories that she had received were released. They didn’t come back to me. They went...[...]I don’t know exactly. They went to the place where memories once existed before Receivers were created. Someplace out there—” He gestured vaguely with his arm. “And then the people had access to them[...]It was chaos[...]They really suffered for a while[...]it certainly made them aware of how they need a Receiver to contain all that pain. And knowledge.” (Lowry 1993:104)

It hurts the community members to be implicated as spectators. Having never truly felt pain before, it would be a rough transition for them. However, the knowledge they’d gain from sharing in Jonas’ role as acting spectator would be ultimately beneficial for the community—just not for the system currently in place. It would transform the spectacle culture into something different. A more sensually aware

and informed population would inevitably make changes to the structure of their society once aware of its oppressive confinement, as evident through Jonas' rebellious trajectory once the memories show him an alternative path. Yet the current manifestation of spectacle culture that keeps the community in its colorless, passionless, ignorant state denies the people the ability to recognize their own power. They can't rebel against manipulation if they don't realize they're being manipulated in the first place.

To be a spectator is to find significance in what one's watching, whatever that may be. For Katniss, watching the Hunger Games as a child taught her how to survive once she herself was in the arena, while the Capitol children only found significance in its entertainment value. The Faction leaders observed Tris' simulations to see whether or not she was Divergent, while the Bureau of Genetic Welfare designed the spectacle of Chicago to learn more about the generational effects of genetic manipulation. Jonas and the Giver experience memories to learn from both the successes and failures of the past, in order to be prepared to aid the Council of Elders in major decisions, but the people of the community, so lacking in passion and sensory awareness, are unable to see the significance in much of anything. The act of spectating is indeed *active*. It has an end goal in mind, and this is where its power lies. Anyone can perform—one doesn't even need to be aware of an audience in order to do it—and plenty of people passively internalize spectacle messages. But if the spectacle bends to the will of its spectators (as seen by how Katniss understood the importance of appealing to her audience when she performed within the Games), spectators have a degree of influence over how

spectacle culture operates. Spectatorship is what makes spectacle culture survive—and therefore, the role of spectator is the most powerful role of all.

In *The Hunger Games*, everyone gains knowledge from both performing and spectating. In *Divergent*, everyone is a performer but unaware of outside audiences. Meanwhile, in *The Giver*, the spectacle of Sameness and the community's containment of history is so powerful that it's believed only one person can handle being its spectator—and for the system to continue, only one person *should* be the spectator. Throughout the novel, Jonas begins to recognize that this belief only serves to maintain the status quo, and nothing and no one else. Sameness doesn't serve any greater purpose other than keeping the population passive and calm: unlike Panem or Chicago, the community isn't under the control of any one oppressive leader. Nobody is actively working against Jonas, although he's working plenty hard himself. Jonas begins to see the world for how it truly is. After seeing colors and feeling the powerful stirrings of sexual desire, liberated from the fabrications of Sameness, he realizes that despite the pain it would cause, everyone would benefit overall from access to the memories he's received. The power of spectatorship bestowed upon *The Giver's* protagonist distinguishes it from the other novels, and offers the hopeful possibility of liberation from spectacle culture that the other dystopias do not.

How does the Jonas even begin to comprehend the newfound responsibilities that come with being society's designated spectator? Jonas is entitled to receive any information he desires: "From this moment you are exempted from rules governing rudeness. You may ask any questions of any citizen and you will receive answers"



(Lowry 1993:68). Spectators aren't concerned about being intrusive; the desire for information trumps social convention. We see this in modern society most notably with paparazzi, one of the driving forces of celebrity spectacle culture, but it also occurs in smaller circles with gossip and secret-telling. This is why the receiving of memories is such an intimate act. Sharing information can be a deeply personal experience and cannot be taken lightly.

However, it's also a little strange. In order to receive a memory from the Giver, Jonas must remove his tunic and "lie face down" on the bed, as the Giver "transmit[s] the memory" by "plac[ing] his hands on Jonas' bare back" (Lowry 1993:79). The physical action is an anti-spectacle of sorts. One receives memories in a quiet, calm space through intimate physical contact, a great contrast to spectacles like the Hunger Games, a nationwide media circus with a physically and emotionally detached audience. The power of intimate contact is also why sex is so transgressive in these novels: sex between Tris and Four or Katniss and Peeta would be a similarly intimate, loving, and most importantly private act hidden from the view of any possible spectators. Unlike most of the events in Tris and Katniss' lives, sex isn't for show, just as the intimate ritual of receiving a memory isn't meant for anyone else's eyes. However, the parallels between Jonas' intimacy with the Giver and those ultimately sexually active heterosexual couples show that the act of receiving a memory reads as unsettlingly sexual—pedophilic, even, given the age difference between 12-year-old Jonas and the old man. What do we make of this in the context of the spectacle powers at play?

Firstly, the sexual undertones of giving and receiving inherently connect the process to sexual reproduction, in which the memory represents a man's seed. This model of reproduction is represented as the passing on of values and memories between father and son. Women are entirely erased from the process, as the mother figure, supposed to be the first person known and remembered, is notably absent. The Giver is teaching Jonas how to reproduce without the help of a woman.

However, because it's a sexually charged scene between two men, there's a homoerotic element to it. Given the Giver and Jonas' father-son relationship, that intimacy therefore carries undertones of incest. This could serve as commentary for the long-term health of a society that continues to store all its memories in one vessel: the mechanisms of Sameness are as unhealthy and unnatural as inbreeding. The memories ought to be shared by all— keeping the memories between two people is an intellectual form of incest. There's currently no diversity of thought in the community, just as there's no diversity in genes. In other words, an incestual system begets incestual relationships.

In a similar vein, while the act of giving and receiving may be a type of anti-spectacle, it still occurs within the context of Sameness. Jonas and the Giver were still raised among it, and are therefore still influenced by its values, particularly the stifling of emotion and the repression of sexual desire. As Jonas has never known physical expressions of love and intimacy, and the Giver has remained isolated from society for most of his life, it makes sense that their repressed feelings and desires would awkwardly express themselves within this physical interaction. Of course, without the memories, Jonas and the Giver would never know what "normal"

intimacy even looks like, because they've never physically experienced it. Sameness failed to give them an adequate cultural script.

Even though its physicality has been perverted by the spectacle, the act of giving and receiving is still a genuine act of intimacy. This is what distinguishes the diversity and vibrancy of the Giver's memories from the monochromatic system of Sameness: the memories are unfiltered and "real." They're someone's genuine, unedited interpretation of the world. Even if it is a spectacle of sorts, it's also more sensually powerful than anything Jonas has ever experienced before, more "real" than the fabrication of Jonas' lived experience. Jonas' understanding of the world is inverted: if the Giver's memories are what's "real," and his black-and-white, sensually dulled understanding of "real life" is a fabrication, what does that say about *The Giver's* definition of reality? Drawing from *The Hunger Games'* definition of reality as unedited emotion and *Divergent's* definition of reality as an unfabricated interpretation of environment, *The Giver's* definition encompasses both. If life in the community, with its genetically regulated emotions and interpreted environments, bears no semblance to "reality," does this mean access to memories is the key to possibly escaping it?

This is certainly true for Jonas. Jonas' innate ability to receive—the reason why he was chosen—is because he possesses "the Capacity to See Beyond" (Lowry 1993:63). "Seeing beyond" refers to Jonas and The Giver's capabilities to see past the wool of Sameness pulled over everyone else's eyes. Like *Divergence*, it's due to a genetic abnormality, one that correlates with "different, lighter eyes" (Lowry 1993:20). Clearly, even in a society designed to breed homogeny and Sameness,

genetic diversity was necessary for its survival—it's clear from the start that this system is inherently flawed and fragile, foreshadowing its eventual breakdown. After all, Jonas' ability to spectate upon Sameness from the outside was bestowed upon him by a loophole in the system, unintentionally handing him the power to destroy it.

Growing up in what should have been a sensory-deprived Sameness, the Giver's aptitude for receiving manifested in "hearing beyond," or the ability to hear music. Jonas, meanwhile, can see colors, as opposed to the black-and-white interpretation of Sameness. To hear or see beyond is essentially to experience the "real," unfabricated environment, breaking free from the confines of Sameness. To be a Receiver, then, is to be gifted with the capability to liberate oneself from Sameness—implying the power that comes with spectatorship. Of course, this liberation is a process. Jonas discovers his ability to "see beyond" gradually, and at first isn't quite sure what's happening. It starts during his year as an Eleven, but he is finally prompted to discuss this phenomenon with the Giver after it occurs when looking at his friend, Fiona:

Jonas stood for am moment beside his bike, startled. It had happened again: the thing that he thought of now as "seeing beyond." This time it had been Fiona that had undergone that fleeting indescribable change. As he looked up and toward her going through the door, it happened; she changed. Actually, Jonas thought, trying to recreate it in his mind, it wasn't Fiona in her entirety. It seemed to be just her hair. And just for that flickering instant.  
(Lowry 1993:90-91)

It's significant that Jonas is particularly stricken by Fiona, of all people. Jonas is attracted to Fiona, firstly indicated in the text when he has a "stirring" dream about wanting to bathe her. While at twelve years old, Jonas doesn't quite understand

these feelings, he does understand that they are linked to his sensory perceptions. Jonas' sensory awakening coincides with puberty. These "flickering instant[s]" of seeing red are not unlike the fluttery feeling of seeing a crush, for example, at that age. Starting to see other people in a new, sexual light during puberty is also a type of sensory awakening. It's a new way of seeing the "real," transitioning from childhood innocence and ignorance of such matters to embracing and experiencing sexuality as an adult.

To those who can perceive it, Fiona's red hair is "quite distinctive" (Lowry 1993:94) in a sea of Sameness. To stand out in any way in Jonas' society is quite unusual, although not unheard of—yet Fiona isn't so much othered for having red hair as much as Giver and Jonas are for being the only two who can actually see it:

The Giver chuckled, suddenly. "We've never completely mastered Sameness. I suppose the genetic scientists are still hard at work trying to work the kinks out. Hair like Fiona's must drive them crazy." (Lowry 1993:95)

The fact that Fiona's hair defies this attempt at genetic and sensory control makes her relationship with Jonas especially fascinating. Is he attracted to her hair because he's attracted to her—or was his ability to see her hair subconsciously the reason he was ever attracted to her in the first place? Whatever the reason, due to Jonas' interest in Fiona and her fiery hair, Jonas leans into this "seeing beyond" and "fiercely" proclaims that they "shouldn't have!" switched to Sameness (Lowry 1993:95). Fiona is further proof that the community's spectacle culture isn't entirely stable. Fiona's hair was there to see, and Jonas had the ability to see it. Two failures of genetic engineering brought them together. From the start, their connection has

been a physical representation of the limitations of Sameness. Therefore, Jonas' feelings about Fiona are inherently connected to his burgeoning rebellion.

Jonas' coinciding sexual and sensory awakenings have led him to question the system. As in *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* dystopias, sex and sexual attraction is a threat to the community's status quo. However, as the community has already genetically stifled any serious emotions and sensual stimulation, it makes sense that they would also work to suppress sexual desire. While community has succeeded in eliminating sexual desire by pathologizing and treating it medically, it appears that Sameness, just as it failed to remove red hair from the gene pool, has also failed to genetically remove the passion of sexual desire. Therefore, the community is forced to treat it medically. As it was also stronger than the forces of Sameness, Fiona's red hair represents that sexual passion that the community's geneticists were never able to breed out. As in the other books, reproduction continues to remain slightly out of reach of governmental control. Its re-appropriation, therefore, continues to be inherently rebellious in *The Giver*.

As Jonas begins to feel sexual desire—called “Stirrings” by the community—he feels his desire for Fiona quite passionately: “I wanted it so terribly. I could feel the wanting all through me” (Lowry 1993:36). As this kind of deep feeling is a direct threat to the neutrality of Sameness, when young adults in the community reach puberty they begin to take Stirring-suppressing pills, which they continue to take until they are Old: “He knew about the pills. His parents both took them each morning. And some of his friends did, he knew” (Lowry 1993:38). Once Jonas has his

first Stirrings—manifesting in his sexually charged dream about wanting to bathe Fiona—he begins to take these pills as well.

Even family life is kept devoid of passion. Jonas' parents chastise him for using the word "love," referring to their feelings for him in simplistic terms like "pride" and "enjoy[ment]" (Lowry 1993:127). In order to marry, one must apply for a spouse, who is then assigned based on predicted compatibility. It's a bureaucratic and unromantic process. After three years of observation, married couples are allowed to apply to receive two children, a boy and a girl. In a world without sex, parents don't conceive their own offspring. The community's "newchildren" are produced by Birthmothers, an occupation of "very little honor" (Lowry 1993:21), who birth three children and then spend the rest of their life as laborers. The text does not mention how Birthmothers are impregnated; although given the community's general disdain for sexual desire, it's safe to assume that it isn't through intercourse. Of course, their low status in society may not only be due to any association with sexuality, but also because birthmothers experience the heightening of the senses that comes with pregnancy and childbirth. Most importantly, a mother's love is too threatening to the already fragile spectacle of Sameness. Therefore, it may be in the spectacle's best interest to keep the birthmothers somewhat removed from everyone else, so that they don't have the opportunity to share the vivid details of their experience, which are perhaps the most emotionally powerful of any that goes on within the community. Jonas knows people from plenty of professions, but he never meets a birthmother.

Jonas does, however, receive a memory of generational and familial love from the Giver, his surrogate father figure, which prompts him to re-appropriate reproduction from the community through his care for his family's pale-eyed infant ward, Gabriel. While Jonas' sexual interest in Fiona may have been the catalyst for his "seeing beyond," she is not the reason he ultimately decides to stop taking his Stirrings pill and let himself feel his natural desires. Instead, it's the concept of love. After his parents laugh at his use of the word, Jonas tells Gabriel that maybe "[t]here could be love" (Lowry 1993:129). Then, "[t]he next morning, for the first time, Jonas did not take his pill. Something within him, something that had grown here through the memories, told him to throw the pill away" (Lowry 1993:129). After four weeks without it, "he knew he couldn't go back to the world of no feelings that he had lived in so long" (Lowry 1993:131). Jonas opens himself up to feel sexual desire, but he doesn't need Fiona to complete the reproductive cycle—his caretaking of Gabriel fulfills that need. Jonas has become a surrogate father without having sex. While he still cares for Fiona, she no longer has a significant presence in his life.

While both sex and love are threatening to the spectacle in similar and sometimes overlapping ways, *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Giver* all argue that love is ultimately the more powerful of the two, for several reasons. First, and most importantly, the books treat sex and lust as fleeting. They don't spend much time explicitly addressing either of them. There may be a sex scene, but a narrative of love can span an entire trilogy. Even Jonas' lust for Fiona quickly runs its course. When it comes to rebelling against the government, revolution requires a long-term commitment, which can't be sustained by sex alone. Sex is the bomb that blows up



the government headquarters, while love is working together to rebuild in the aftermath. Second, while obviously not always the case, within these books sex often comes as a result of love. Katniss and Tris' sex scenes were significant because of the intimacy and love between them and their partners. Their first-person descriptions of the act weren't concerned with physicality at all, only the raw, unedited emotions attached to it—an anti-spectacle. Thirdly, love cannot be commoditized or spectacularized in the way that sex can. It's certainly attempted, but it's never very effective, because once recognizes as part of the spectacle it's understood to not be real: Katniss and Peeta fail to quiet the rebellion in the districts because the people of Panem could tell it was all an act, and Tris recognizes that she's in a simulation because she can tell that the man she's interacting with isn't really Four. Finally, there are many different kinds of love, not all of which correspond with sexuality—most notably Katniss' love for her sister, Tris' love for her friends and family, and Jonas' love for Gabriel, all of which fuel their desire for revolution equally if not more than their love for their romantic interests.

All three of the dystopian texts follow this trajectory: the protagonist's preoccupation with sex or sexuality evolves into a deeper regard for and understanding of love. This commonality of narrative may be best understood in the context of the modern day spectacle culture in which these books were written. Young adult novels often incorporate a sexual undertone within their narratives, but these particular stories simply wouldn't be as popular with young readers' parents if Katniss, Tris, and Jonas chose sex over love. Ironically, it's a more spectacle-friendly narrative if it they ultimately arc to a more mature engagement with love

instead of (or at least in conjunction with) sex. This represents an endless struggle with spectacle culture: there must be a delicate balance between subversive and spectacle-friendly material, as the books must strategically assimilate into spectacle culture to ensure their critiques of it are read at all.

However, regardless of any authorial intentions, whatever they may have been, it makes narrative sense that Jonas' rebellion would be quiet and chaste, as opposed to Katniss and Tris' sexy and explosive revolutions. Instead of expressing intimacy through a sexual act, Jonas feels a more innocent and chaste kind of love. Instead of losing his virginity, Jonas gives away a part of himself to Gabriel, sharing memories with his surrogate brother as he puts him down to sleep: "He was not aware of giving the memory; but suddenly he realized that it was becoming dimmer, that it was sliding through his hand into the being of the newchild" (Lowry 1993:116). Jonas is continuing a different cycle of reproduction. Despite being "not yet qualified to be a Giver himself; nor[...]Gabriel[...]selected to be a Receiver" (Lowry 1993:117), Jonas is already continuing the line of Receivers. This is a direct threat to the status quo, as the system relies on only one person being allowed access to the collective memories. While Jonas is set to replace the Giver, Gabriel isn't supposed to receive at all—it's illegal. As with Tris in *Divergent*, Jonas' brand of reproduction entails the giving of memories. However, unlike Tris, the memories Jonas is giving are real; it's an anti-spectacle act of love. To pass on his group's history to his surrogate son is actually assuming the traditional role of parenting. Jonas' may not have physically reproduced Gabriel, but he is already acting like a father. He's also indirectly giving him life—he gives Gabriel the memories to put him

to sleep and gift him with sweet dreams because if he doesn't start sleeping through the night, the Nurturing Center will release him.

Thus Jonas continues the line of pale-eyed surrogate fathers and sons, giving and receiving memories with in scenes with strange sexual undertones and a notable absence of women. The question arises: if biological motherhood is too threatening to the spectacle, due to the sensory and emotional overload of pregnancy and birth, where does that leave fatherhood? It's certainly reproductive in its own right, as seen by the sexual undertones in the act of giving and receiving, but what are we to make of the exclusion of women? Is it a rejection of the nuclear heterosexual family structure? Or is it fueled by patriarchal urges, wrestling the power of life away from women? The answers lie in an exploration of the book's ultimate demonization of Fiona.

While Jonas gives memories to calm a restless child—giving him access to “real” life while also working to save him from death—Fiona's career follows the opposite path, preparing the Old for their release, a ritualized death by lethal injection. The Giver explains: “She's very efficient at her work, your red-haired friend. Feelings are not part of the life she's learned” (Lowry 1993:153). While recalling the passion she initially inspired, mentioning her “red hair,” the Giver juxtaposes Jonas' earlier feelings with the disturbing lack of emotion she feels over the Old people she seemingly cares so much about. Fiona lacks the maternal instincts that Jonas would need in a partner: he'd want someone who would share in his disgust with ritualized murder. They've subverted their gender roles: while Fiona is lacking in maternal instincts, Jonas is more deeply in touch with his own

emotions—a stereotypical feminine quality— than anyone else in the community (other than the Giver). Sameness has neutralized Fiona’s capacity for maternal love—but Jonas, liberated from such restrictions, is also free from his traditionally prescribed gender role. Could it be that “real” human nature, which Jonas represents, is therefore also liberated from gender roles? Just because Jonas is a man doesn’t mean he can’t be emotional, and if Fiona were also free from Sameness, she too could have that capacity. But there’s the catch.

It’s certainly possible that Sameness absorbs the differences in gender roles, but the text’s stubborn exclusion of women in the reproductive process stems from the patriarchal values of its society of origin. Things haven’t changed much since 1993: Fiona, like all women in modern day spectacle culture, is inherently dehumanized by the spectacle simply because of her gender. Women are excluded from Jonas’ reproductive activities because giving and receiving is understood to be an anti-spectacle, and a woman’s presence would ultimately corrupt that. Of course, Jonas himself would be complicit in that—after all, his first experience “seeing beyond” involves spectating upon her hair with his male gaze. Unfortunately, due to the sexism pervading these books and the modern day spectacle culture, Jonas has no interest in bringing Fiona (whom he himself made into a spectacle) into the innocent Gabriel’s pure, anti-spectacle spaces. Therefore, Jonas’ revolution is fueled by his paternal love for Gabriel rather than romantic love with Fiona, making him the only protagonist so far to abstain from sex and lead a chaste, sexless revolution.

Jonas is younger than Katniss and Tris—they’re sixteen while he is only twelve, so it makes sense that he wouldn’t be sexually active yet. However, he is also

a young man: unlike his female counterparts, for whom sexual objectification is simply part of the experience, it's possible for Jonas to engage with spectacle culture with no immediate threat to his chaste identity, both within the world inside the text and for the readers outside of it. While his role as spectator as opposed to performer does play a role in this—after all, the spectator has the power to objectify the performer, not the other way around—that role is also inherently gendered: women are often the objectified performers for male spectators. Even at the age of twelve, Jonas is already making Fiona the object of his male gaze. What does it mean, then, that the most powerful position within spectacle culture—the spectator—is predominantly gendered as male? While this certainly isn't its only possible manifestation, it's important to note that spectacle culture often becomes a vehicle for sexism and other forms of oppression to sustain themselves.

This is true even within the structures in the narratives themselves. While Katniss and Tris lose their innocence by performing violence as a foil to sex, Jonas loses his by spectating upon an incident of violence for violence's sake. His moment comes when he witnesses his father release a "newchild" through a security tape. This experience is particularly significant for Jonas because not only does it shock and disturb him—like many things he's witnessed as Receiver—but it's also presented to him in through a different medium. After a year of receiving, this is the first time Jonas watches an event on a screen, and this is what ultimately corrupts his innocence. It affords him the emotional and physical distance required for spectators to easily disengage. *"He killed it! My father killed it!"* Jonas said to himself, stunned at what he was realizing. He continued to stare at the screen numbly"

(Lowry 1993:150). Jonas is *numb*—without feeling the experience as directly as he's used to, he doesn't quite know how to process the emotion. The feeling isn't literally "given" to him. Shocked and disturbed by his father's chilling act of violence, it takes time for the weight of it to sink in.

Yet sink in it does. Jonas doesn't want to go home. The sight of seeing his own father murder an innocent child is more than enough to rob Jonas of his childhood innocence. He completely loses faith in his father and everyone around him, leading him to plan his escape from the community in order to release his received memories. He wants the community to truly feel the pain they've caused. It is this act of spectatorship that breaks him, viewing death on a television screen. Jonas has seen death before in memories—that's how he recognized it—but even in this removed state, the spectacle is still at its most harmful. Why does the impersonal act of watching television change everything? Why is that what causes Jonas to fully lose faith in the system?

It's complex. The television spectacle differs from the spectacle of memory in that it's impersonal by nature; it keeps the spectator physically and emotionally removed from the spectacle, allowing for more superficial reactions—for example, being selfishly and mindlessly entertained by the Hunger Games. A memory, however, exists as an anti-spectacle: it's personal, it's physical, and there's no way to avoid its emotional power. Television offers the option of avoiding that closeness—so when Jonas is finally given the freedom to choose whether or not to feel something, a choice denied to him one way or another throughout his entire life, it is both painful and liberating to choose to embrace feeling the powerful range of

conflicting emotions. After all, the memories he received from the Giver were all from people he didn't know, while his own father was on the television screen. This particular spectacle featured a complicated intersection of conflicting degrees of separation, so it's no wonder Jonas wasn't sure how to react. But as Receiver, the spectacle has given him the capacity to know he has the choice. Inadvertently, through its own inherent flaws and loopholes, the community's spectacle of Sameness gave him the tools to liberate himself from spectacle culture. Watching his father release the newchild gives Jonas the motivation to leave the community and his received memories behind, giving the population his received knowledge so that they too can make such choices for themselves. He wants the community no longer in the dark about the cruelty begotten from their unfeeling society.

The final chapters of *The Giver* offer an ambiguous but hopeful ending. Jonas "escape[s]" (Lowry 1993:166) the community with Gabriel in tow, saving him from his officially scheduled release. "[A]s he moved away from the community," Jonas also "shed the memories and [left] them behind for the people," (Lowry 1993:169). As he travels farther and farther away, the memories become "more shallow" and "weaker than they had been" (Lowry 1993:169). By leaving these memories behind, he also leaves the community with the knowledge of love, pain, and suffering that will help liberate them from the spectacle of Sameness.

Jonas has escaped. At the very end of the book, he and Gabriel arrive at a snowy place that Jonas recognizes from "a memory of his own" (Lowry 1993:178). Therefore, it isn't a memory from the Giver, but it also isn't a part of Sameness. Jonas has arrived in a fantastical place, and in the last line of the book, he hears "music"

(Lowry 1993:180), even though the Giver never gave him a sample of hearing beyond. Therefore, the book ends with the revelation that Jonas has officially stepped out of the community's spectacle culture and into something new with baby Gabriel. Gabriel's presence shows that the legacy Jonas began with his surrogate fatherhood will live on in this new world, and perhaps entrance to this new world requires the next generation. Even the community he left behind will likely transform for the better, once the Giver is also released and all the memories are transferred back into the collective. Jonas accomplished what Tris and Katniss could not: he escaped the spectacle.

What set Jonas apart? How could he escape when they couldn't? The answer lies in the active role he played. By acting purely as a spectator and avoiding performance all together, Jonas was able to recognize and embrace the responsibilities that came with spectacle culture's most integral role. The society of the spectacle needs spectators to survive. After all, when Jonas removed himself from the community, its spectacle crumbled without him. Jonas' story also sends the message that spectators who fail to combat the oppressive spectacle culture they bear witness to are inherently complicit in its actions. Jonas certainly believed this: knowing that only he had the power to do something to save Gabriel and stop the oppression of Sameness, he sacrificed his comfortable life in order to make a change. He saw no benefit for himself in leaving; all he cared about was making sure Gabriel survived. It was a bold and heroic task—and because he was designated spectator, he had the opportunity to do it.



## Conclusion

While this essay focused on a textual analysis of dystopian literature, it's important to remember that this genre's presence in popular culture is due in part to the popularity of their film adaptations. *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Giver* may serve to problematize our own modern day spectacle culture, but as million dollar, multimedia franchises, they're also active contributors to it. Just as in the books, spectacle culture has absorbed and re-appropriated its own critiques. We know that Katniss and Tris weren't able to escape its influences, but what about us? Could we, like Jonas, find a way out? Or does our spectacle culture's absorption of the dystopian genre give us the answer?

As the books themselves are a product of spectacle culture, they have, like Tris, "use[d] its syntax" (Debord 31). Even in their critique of modern spectacle culture, aspects of their narratives still uphold its traditional heteropatriarchal values, particularly in their treatment of their female protagonists regarding sex and reproduction. These books may be arguing against the status quo, but the sexism of modern society still manages to seep in. When Katniss and Tris lose their respective virginities, it's portrayed very ambiguously. It's implied that they have sex, but never explicitly stated. In both trilogies, the sex in question happens toward the end of the third book, as it's deeply tied to their loss of innocence, a sexist and patriarchal concept. It's no accident that Tris dies the day after losing her virginity—she can't exist without the sexual innocence that made her an acceptable young adult role model in our patriarchal society. Her sacrifice represents a return to that

state of innocence and purity, as in her last moments she has a vision of returning to her mother's arms. While Katniss at least survives her trilogy, her story of resistance concludes rather conservatively: she settles down and has the family she never wanted. While her decision to have children implies her hope for society's future, if that future is the heterosexual nuclear family, it's not quite so revolutionary after all.

Jonas is another case entirely. His story entirely erases women from the reproductive process, leaving them out of the revolution altogether. Jonas and Gabriel, two young boys, were able to escape spectacle culture—but like Tris, the former receiver, Rosemary, was only able to escape through death. This may serve to illustrate yet another way in which spectacle culture absorbs its resistance, but in the context of our own spectacle culture, it still sends readers the sexist message that only men can lead successful rebellions.

It is unfortunate but inevitable that oppressive elements of spectacle culture will be embedded within its critique. After all, as we saw in the *Divergent* trilogy, it's impossible not to internalize at least some of its messaging. And as we saw in all three of these dystopias, sometimes you have to fight spectacle with spectacle. These books may have been published for monetary gain— after all, living in a capitalist society, the authors have to earn money somehow—but the fact that these books made money at all is testament to the fact that something about them resonated with people. Who knows? That something may very well be their critique of the spectacle.

Likely due in part to their female protagonists, *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* were hugely successful with young women. Their critique of spectacle

culture likely resonated with that particular demographic because women are raised with the innate knowledge that they are being watched. In today's patriarchal society, women exist as spectacle. Therefore, women internalize the critical eye of the omnipresent male gaze even when they're alone in front of the mirror. This is also part of the reason Katniss and Tris were never able to escape its grasp. Spectacle culture is inherently sexist, and Jonas was in the privileged position of being both a man and a spectator (roles which more often than not coincide with one another). If the spectator holds the greatest power, these books (and films) give young women the opportunity to take that power as they read and watch—if they choose to do so.

The books also implicate the spectator. *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* are written in present tense, allowing for a cinematic, in-the-moment reading experience. *The Hunger Games* in particular builds up the titular spectacle of violence and then shocks the reader with its disturbing, unglamorous reality, making them feel guilty for ever expecting shallow entertainment. Yet by implicating the spectator, the books also let them know they have power. If the reader feels guilty, perhaps they will analyze why, and think about what that means in a greater societal context, leading them to become more knowledgeable—and therefore more powerful—in their revelations about the mechanisms of spectacle culture.

Unfortunately, such nuance does not translate well to the big screen. The film adaptations, true to form as a vehicle of spectacle culture, left out quite a bit of what made all three dystopias such radical critiques. Despite the novels' critique of the

spectacle of violence, *The Hunger Games* films used battle footage from the arena in its marketing techniques, glamorizing the violence and action just like the Capitol. The *Divergent* franchise also alters the source material to the extent that Tris and Four have very unambiguous sex during *Insurgent*, the second film, before she turns herself in to Erudite headquarters. This sexes up her revolution more than the books did, making it more glamorous, cinematic, and spectacle-friendly. It also maintains the sexist implication that the atonement of self-sacrifice must immediately follow loss of sexual innocence. Meanwhile, *The Giver* film ages up its young cast, making Jonas and Fiona eighteen instead of twelve, therefore making a sexy romance plot possible between them. They also make Fiona an accomplice in Jonas' revolutionary actions, because as we've discussed, sex and rebellion go hand in hand.

It's not just about gender. Spectacle culture dictates society's normative standards, therefore determining which people deserve visibility and which voices are allowed to be heard. We've established that our spectacle culture is sexist, but it's also racist and ableist. *The Hunger Games* film adaptations whitewashed "olive-skinned" Katniss (along with Gale, Haymitch, and the rest of the Seam) and wrote out Peeta's disability narrative after losing his leg in the first Games. The *Divergent* film franchise also left out a significant disability narrative, leaving out the character Edward, who loses an eye in conflict with another Dauntless initiate in the first book. Perhaps these narratives were excluded because they weren't deemed marketable or beneficial enough to those in power to warrant inclusion. The spectacle is selective about whose stories it chooses to tell, therefore influencing

which voices society values over others, telling us who deserves empathy and who deserves respect. And given its influence over our socialization, it's no wonder our society continues to be sexist, racist, and ableist today. Nobody's dreams or hallucinations are projected onscreen, and we aren't genetically engineered to see in black-and-white. But our spectacle culture is still harmful nonetheless.

So what can we do about it? Knowing how Katniss, Tris, and Jonas found modes of resistance within their respective spectacle cultures, what are we to learn from them? For one, we can see that even though it's omnipresent, we still have agency within spectacle culture. Even if we can't escape, we don't have to passively accept the status quo. We learn from Katniss, Tris, and Jonas that knowledge is power. Staying informed and aware of the machinations of spectacle culture makes us that much more equipped to resist its influences.

Katniss showed us that even if we're expected to perform, we are still afforded the power to control what image we project. It can be empowering to choose which aspects of oneself to present to the world: the popularity of social media like Facebook and Instagram is due in part to this phenomenon. It's just important to keep in mind that social performance entails selective presentation, and that commoditizing emotions takes its toll on our well-being (as it did for Katniss). It's true that we'll never entirely be able to withdraw from spectacle culture, as we can never completely deactivate the screens we've internalized inside our heads. But we can still switch off the television or the computer. We still have power over our own physicality.

Tris presents a significant example of the importance of resisting the internalization of spectacle culture. While it's likely that we will live and die by the spectacle as she did, it's still within our power to *transform* the spectacle that we're forced to live under. Understanding that the spectacle within her head was just that—inside *her*—she recognized that she had the power to control it. Tris' story more than any other exemplifies the importance of the statement, "knowledge is power." By understanding the way her spectacle culture operated, Tris was able to take it into her own hands and revolutionarily transform it, both inside her head during the simulation and at the Bureau when she released the memory serum.

And then there's Jonas, who had the most successful revolution of all. He alone was able to escape the power of the spectacle. He taught us that there is power in spectatorship—and while *The Giver* came out more than twenty years ago, it appears this message is starting to sink in. Our population is starting to recognize that we have the power to demand better, more progressive media. Even *The Hunger Games*, a series primarily concerned with performance, sends this message by implicating its readers as spectators. *Divergent* and *The Giver* also remind its young adult readers that they share Tris and Jonas' power of reproduction—it's up to them as the next generation to reproduce their own revolutionary values and transform spectacle culture for the better.

If the spectacle's power lies in its spectators, the books are literally handing us the tools to transform it. Not only do the books' plots warn against surrendering to the spectacle's power, they also, by way of implicating the reader as spectator, implicitly inform the reader that they have the power of spectatorship. Recognizing

that power is the first step toward revolution. The next step for spectators is to utilize this power, learning to actively receive and interpret information instead of passively and obediently accepting it. Once these empowered spectators understand the significance of spectacle and its societal implications, they can then work to do something about it.

As readers, we are spectators—not just of these particular books, or even their films, but of all media in general. Even in reading this thesis, you have the power of spectatorship—you decide whether or not you agree with what I have to say. The spectacle system cannot work without spectators. Therefore, spectators hold the power to shut it down if they stop watching. Spectators have the power to actively engage with what they read, watch, or otherwise consume and take a stand if they don't agree with it. They also have the choice to accept the status quo, letting the power in spectatorship go to waste. As readers hold and read these books, the authors have quite literally handed their readers the power of spectatorship. Take it.

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